RICHARD DARE

MRS ALFRED BALDWIN

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VOL. I.

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RICHARD DARE

BY

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AUTHOR OF

'THE STORY OF A MARRIAGE' 'WHERE TOWN AND COUNTRY MEET' ETC.

Each man has his own vocation; his talent is his call.
There is one direction in which all space is open to him.

EMERSON

IN TWO VOLUMES—VOL. I.

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TO MY HUSBAND

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OF

THE FIRST VOLUME

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RICHARD DARE

CHAPTER I

THE BLACKSMITH AND HIS SON

'Dinna curse him, sir; I have heard a good man say that a curse was like a stone flung up to the heavens, and maist like to return on his head that sent it.'—SCOTT.

IT was a drowsy afternoon in August. The clock in the Market Place of Dormington had just informed as many of the inhabitants as were awake to listen to its remarks that the time was half-past three, an unprofitable hour for man and beast, when the spirit of slumber descends upon all alike impartially. A flour-waggon rumbled slowly along the road in the direction of the bridge, the driver so fast asleep on his perch that he was borne nodding

past his favourite public-house without being aware of the fact, and the pot-boy on the look-out for him had his eyes shut at the moment, and was so deaf with yawning that he did not hear the heavy wheels approaching.

At the upper end of the Market Place, opposite the Town Hall, a man and a boy were slowly unpacking a crate of earthenware in front of a crockery shop, frequently pausing to rub their elbows and to gossip with the passers-by. They had littered the road and obstructed what little traffic there was since early in the forenoon, which combined exertions necessitated frequent visits to the public-house, whence they came back, refreshed, to resume what they were pleased to call their work.

In front of a comfortable-looking red-brick house below the church, a painter on a ladder was feebly smearing the venetian shutters of a second-floor window with green paint, taking a holiday between each dip of the brush into the paint-pot to gaze up and down the Market

Place from his high point of vantage. Whether the man was a native of Dormington or not, he had caught the prevailing spirit of the place, and had spent a week up a ladder very contentedly without making any visible progress with his work. It was obvious that in Dormington labour was paid for by time and not by piece. Little hard work was done there except by the women, and as they toiled chiefly in the capacity of wives and mothers, their ceaseless service was taken—like other good things—too much as a matter of course, though, had they gone on strike, their families would have raised a bitter outcry.

Yet, even in sleepy Dormington, the spirit of competition had made its appearance, and a number of tradesfolk, by no means blood-thirsty in other respects, were busy cutting each other's throats as fast as they could. Where formerly two drapers had sufficed for the little town and made a livelihood for themselves, there

were now four, boasting much plate-glass among them and tottering on the verge of bankruptcy. Shoemakers' shops, too, had sprung up in advance of all possible wants of Dormington for years to come, even had the inhabitants been quadrupeds and required two pairs of shoes apiece. Only the public-houses seemed to multiply without detriment to themselves, and in the main street two glaring new ones did a brisk business on market days. But the houses in which the hardest drinking was done, irrespective of times and seasons, lay discreetly hidden in the back streets, where the chill glance of respectability might be most easily avoided.

In one of these, the Barley Mow in Dog Lane—a dark and dingy house favourably known to seasoned topers—Samuel Atherley, the blacksmith, was sitting with his pipe and pot according to his invariable afternoon practice. Said the landlord of the Barley Mow, with pardonable professional pride, 'I 'aven't a more reg'lar, respectable, 'ard drinkin'

customer than what Sam Atherley is! He's that punctual, you might set the parish clock by 'im. 'Alf-past two of an afternoon 'e comes in, and upo' the stroke o' five 'e's out again, and it's a credit to see 'im when 'e's blind drunk go for the swing door, as straight as a' arrer and as 'armless as a' infant! Sometimes o' nights, I don't deny as e's a bit quarrelsome and free with 'is fisses, but in general 'e does that kind o' thing at 'ome, like a gentleman, and keeps 'is company manners for the Barley Mow.'

It was the blacksmith's custom, while he spent the afternoon at the public-house, to leave the smithy in charge of his son Richard, with strict injunctions not to send for him unless it was for work that the boy could not manage to do single-handed. It was not five minutes' walk from the Barley Mow to Atherley's forge, that stood back from the High Street in a small enclosure flanked on one side by his own house and on the other by a baker's shop.

The blacksmith was not often disturbed in his afternoon's carouse, for the bulk of his work was done by dinner-time. From six o'clock in the morning till eleven, however drunk Atherley might have been overnight, the forge resounded to the cheery ring of the hammer on the anvil, and children on their wandering way to school clustered round the door, to watch the rush of fiery sparks up the wide chimney and listen to the hoarse roar of the big bellows, thrilled with a sense of adventure as they peeped into the deep shade of the smithy. And the delight of seeing Richard blow the bellows while his father shaped a glowing horse-shoe with ringing strokes of the hammer, was heightened by attendant peril. For as soon as the irate blacksmith could throw down his work, he rushed out of the smithy brandishing his hammer, and scattered the little crowd to right and left.

Samuel Atherley had bitter complaints to make of his son that afternoon to his boon

companions at the Barley Mow, and his dull, pompous face was heavy with disapproval as well as purple with drink.

'That lad sober don't frame to work as well as me drunk! His nails isn't tempered proper, and 'is shoes 'ud lame any beast as was shod with 'em, and it takes 'im twice as long again to make a set as it took me afore I was 'is age, for all 'e's so strong and well growed. Would any sane man, knowin' 'is trade, credit as 'e's more interested in the 'orse's foot than what 'e is in the 'orse's shoe?' and he looked fiercely round after the statement to see if his hearers were duly impressed by his son's lack of intelligence.

'Aye, but I tell you 'e is! He's allays took up wi' things as don't concern 'im. Why, only t'other day if 'e 'adn't the impcrence to tell me what 'ad lamed one o' Mr. Featherstone's hunters as was brought me to shoe 'cause it was a ticklish job, and I could do it better'n any man this side o' the country. So Master Richard 'e ups and

examines the 'orse's foot same as if he was a VET. paid to give his opinion professional, and, says 'e, "Father," 'e says, "this isn't a case for shoeing, but for the lancet," and if he didn't take and cut open a habscess 'idden away right under the frog, where no sharp fellow was likely to ha' looked for such a thing! Now me and the groom 'ad settled as it was somethin' quite different, and it was most onpleasant. So I says, "Things is come to a pretty pass when my own son sets up a-teaching of me; it's time as I ripped the blow ballies, and douted the fire, and took and set up in a trade as I may be allowed to know somethin' about!" You never see a lad more daunted by that than 'e was; why, he didn't open 'is mouth again that day!'

'Well, to be sure, 'is imperence!' said the sycophant of the moment, whose glass Atherley had just refilled from his own jug, 'is imperence!'

'You may say that!' replied the injured father. 'Why, one arternoon when I was a-

settin' 'ere peaceful, like a honest workman as 'ad slaved best part of a morning through, 'ow do you think 'e was a-wasting of 'is time? You give it up? I should think so? Why, if 'e didn't make a wooden leg and lash it on to a old hen as 'ad got hers broken accidental under the wheel o' Ben Stott's waggon, and there it was a-peckin' about the road on its peg leg like a reg'lar old timber-toes, and if it 'ad been chewin' a quid as well I couldn't ha' been more surprised than what I was. There was a crowd o' gaping boobies following the old 'en about, and praisin' our Richard, and some on 'em said, "Who but 'im could ha' thought o' such a thing!" Who but 'im indeed!' and in the roar of laughter that followed Atherley felt some consolation for his disappointment in his son. He was listened to and applauded at the Barley Mow if Richard disregarded him at home.

On this particular afternoon, while Sam Atherley was relating his son's misdoings to a congenial audience, the boy was happily

busied with his own affairs, anxious to finish his work before his father returned at five o'clock. He had shut and bolted the lower half of the smithy door, that no one might come in upon him unawares, and, thus protected, was standing behind the big bellows carefully tending a mysterious something simmering in a pot over a charcoal fire in a tall, three-legged brazier.

The lad's dark, curly head was bent over the open vessel, and the glow of the fire illumined the eager young face, that wore an expression of vivid, concentrated interest. To-day's work was only the continuation of yesterday's enthralling pursuit, when, in a spirit of scientific curiosity, he had made a post mortem examination of the remains of a small drowned puppy. But he was not content with his researches in its tiny interior. He was bent on making acquaintance with the young retriever's bones also, and when he had counted their number and endeavoured to find out their use, he intended to fasten

them together with wire, and set up a beautiful skeleton of a dog. But to get the bones perfectly clean, it was necessary to detach the flesh from them by careful boiling, and, without going through the formality of asking permission, Richard had borrowed one of his mother's pans wherein to do his unhallowed cookery and prosecute his researches with all the curiosity of his sex. For, in spite of the popular fallacy to the contrary, it is man and not woman who is the inquisitive being. Man and not woman is the discoverer and inventor. He it is that, impelled by the prompting of an insatiable curiosity, has explored the heavens and the earth, counted the stars and weighed the planets, and wrested from Nature her most hidden secrets. If a woman instead of a man had seen the historic apple fall from the tree, would she have been led by the contemplation of so commonplace an event to enter upon vast and far-reaching scientific speculations? Even had the apple forcibly attracted her

attention by falling on her head instead of on the ground, it would have roused no penetrating curiosity in her to discover in obedience to what law the fruit dropped to the earth when the stalk broke, instead of soaring, bird-like, away through the air. No; a woman would have smoothed her hair and straightened her bonnet, and drawn this practical lesson from the circumstance, that it is unsafe to walk under an apple tree when the fruit is ripe and heavy, and there the matter would have ended.

The boy smiled to himself, then, as he bent with keenest masculine curiosity over the pan in which boiled and bubbled broth of abominable things. Suddenly, he heard himself called, 'Richard!' and, looking up with a frown in anticipation of being disturbed in his congenial work, he saw his mother standing at the door, his baby sister on her arm and his little four-year-old brother tugging at her skirts. She was about to draw the bolt and enter, but Richard hastened to prevent her,

and, leaning his arms on the top of the half door, said, 'I don't want Reuben in here, mother, the little chap's sure to get into mischief or hurt himself.'

Mrs. Atherley smiled at her son with as sweet a pair of grey eyes as ever lent grace and charm to a plain face.

'That's not the real reason, my lad, why you don't want 'im to come in! You're after somethin' o' your own that me and Reuben should 'inder, that's what it is. I hope it's nothing as your father'll find out and be angry with you over, for 'e says you mind a many things more than your own proper trade.'

An angry light kindled in the boy's eyes.

'He's right there if he thinks that! I hate the blacksmith's trade and everything to do with it!' and he pushed his cap back on his brow with an impatient gesture.

'I'm sure I don't know what you want different, Richard,' said his mother in a gentle, fretful voice. 'It's a respectable trade is the

blacksmith's, and if your father didn't drink so heavy he'd make a good living out of it. But I'm onlucky, that's where it is, wi' a husband as can't keep from the drink and a son as thinks hisself above an honest trade,' and she sighed as she dandled the fractious baby on her arm.

Sighing came naturally to Mrs. Atherley. For days together when things were very bad at home she drew her breath in sighs, an involuntary relief to her oppressed spirit. Her life, for seventeen years as Sam Atherley's wife, had been a slow martyrdom. She had been so long the slave of a man unfit to be trusted even with a dog, that, between fear of his temper when he was sober and of his violence when he was drunk, what little spirit she had possessed in her youth was crushed out of her. But a plaintive pliancy in bending before the storm she was powerless to avert had stood her in good stead. She never replied to her husband's upbraiding, always allowed him the privilege of the last

word and silently accepted a curse as the end of a tipsy harangue. The only sign, besides her prematurely grey hair and worn face of suffering, which she regarded as inseparable from married life, was a mild sourness of temper, as of some fluid, originally weak and sweet, that had been exposed to circumstances unfavourable to its preservation.

And now Mrs. Atherley repeated her plaint, 'It's along o' my bad luck, as my son turns up 'is nose at an honest trade!'

Now, this was not the case, and it vexed the boy to find how completely he was mis understood.

'It's nothing of the kind, mother! A blacksmith's trade's as good as any other, but I hate it for all that. Whether it's because I've been beat and bullied over it till I've had enough of it, or because I hate the trade itself, I can't justly tell, but no one'll make a blacksmith o' me when I can see my way to being anything else!'

'And whatever else can you want to be?

Be quiet, Reuben, will you, and don't bother I do think as my children is more tiresome than other folkses,' this last spoken to the fidgety little fellow who had pulled his mother's dress out at the gathers, and was lashing her with a toy whip to make her move on.

'Whatever else do you wish to be, Richard?' repeated his mother.

The boy lifted his arms from the half door on which he was leaning and stood upright, almost a man in height and size. He was sixteen years old, his dark eyes shone with enthusiasm, and though his features were unformed and immature, his face expressed more strength and resolution than is common at his age.

'Well, mother, I like everything about a horse better than making his shoes and putting 'em on. I'd rather drench and blister him, and all that, than I'd do blacksmith's work!'

'Why, Richard, you never mean as you

want to be a beast leech!' said his mother, puckering her brow and giving an adroit backward slap at little Reuben.

'I'd a deal rather be that than what I am now, mother. But I'm thinking o' something beyond horse doctoring. I should like to be a proper doctor—a surgeon with operations to do, cutting off folks' arms and legs, and curing complaints as had puzzled all the other doctors. And I'm fond o' bones, very,' he added, casting a loving glance over his shoulder in the direction of the steaming pan on the tall brazier, 'and of getting to know what's in our insides.'

'For shame of yourself, Richard!' broke forth Mrs. Atherley with unwonted energy; 'for shame of yourself! prying into things as Providence 'as thought best to keep 'id! If the Lord 'ad meant us to know what our insides was like, he'd ha' made no secret of 'em, but hung 'em up outside where we could ha' seen 'em plain!' and she was so wrought up that she would have delivered a rambling

and incoherent scolding to her son if a timely interruption had not diverted her from her purpose.

The afternoon silence was broken by a sound of hoofs, and there rode into the enclosure in front of the smithy, from the High Street, a gentleman mounted on a stout grey cob, accompanied by a pretty and very young lady on a chestnut pony. Mrs. Atherley cast a scared glance over her shoulder, pulled little Reuben down from the mounting-block on which he had managed to scramble, and dragged him away protesting along the alley that led to the garden. From thence she hurried, baby on arm and child swinging from her skirts, to talk over Richard's strange tastes with Mrs. Windybank, her nearest and most intimate gossip.

The elderly gentleman riding the grey cob was Mr. Featherstone, a wealthy land-owner in the neighbourhood, and a well-known figure in the streets of Dormington. He was a good-humoured, talkative man,

rendered popular by his love of local gossip and curiosity in small matters, that left every one with whom he spoke under the impression that he took a special interest in him and his affairs. For the rest, he had frank blue eyes and a laugh so merry and light-hearted, it sounded more like a boy's than that of an elderly man.

The very young lady accompanying Mr. Featherstone was his motherless daughter and only child Margaret, a girl of fourteen, already possessing more dignity of manner than her father, to whom she bore little or no resemblance. She was tall and slender, with an exquisite complexion of red and white, and a quantity of reddish-brown hair, of the same colour as her eyes, hanging about her shoulders, and a smile that came and went with tremulous rapidity. As yet she was very shy, speaking quickly with much change of colour, ways that in a cottage child wearing a sun-bonnet would have been called by their proper name, but that in Miss

Featherstone were supposed to be indications of pride.

Richard Atherley had never seen Mr. Featherstone's daughter before, and it marked an era in his life. At the sight of her he forgot to move the pan that was now boiling briskly and filling the smithy with savoury fumes, such as might greet the delighted senses of a Chinaman at a dinner party in his native land.

Mr. Featherstone roused the lad from his day-dream. 'Here, young fellow! Fasten up the cob will you, and hold the pony while I help my daughter to alight. He's cast a shoe, and I want him shod as quickly as possible. Where's your father, young fellow; where's your father?'

Richard grew crimson as he felt the beautiful red-brown eyes fixed upon him. He became suddenly conscious of his grimy face, of his dirty leather apron, of every hair on his bare, muscular arms. He made an irresolute snatch at his sleeve as though he

would pull it down, and then remembered that he must work bare-armed.

'I'll send for my father, sir; he'll be here almost as soon as the pony is ready for him.'

'Father at the public-house, young fellow? Hey? Spends too much time there. Deuced bad habit, too, in the day. He should wait till night; wait till night.'

'Here, Jack!' shouted Richard to a small boy standing a wrapt spectator at the entrance of the blacksmith's yard; 'cut along to the Barley Mow, will you, and tell my father he's wanted to shoe Miss Featherstone's pony.'

The idle boy received Richard's imperious order with open mouth, as though that were the organ of hearing, but neither stirred nor spoke. Then the idea slowly filtered into his mind, and the dawn of intelligence was visible on his chaotic countenance. He tightened up his loose lips, took his hands out of his pockets, and disappeared round the corner like a flash.

Margaret laughed, and Richard, blushing like a girl, and for the first time in his life

regretting that his face wanted washing, stood at the pony's head while she sprang lightly down.

'Step in, my dear,' said her father cheerfully, 'and take a look round; I don't suppose you were ever in a blacksmith's forge before,' and, gathering up her habit about her slender form, the young girl passed into the smithy like a ray of sunshine, and gazed wondering, but without interest, on the dingy objects about her. As Richard fastened the pony's bridle to the ring in the wall, he noticed that Miss Featherstone's bright hair was of the same colour as its chestnut mane, and he did not know till that day that human hair could be of such a beautiful shade.

While the young girl stood regretting the interruption in her pleasant ride, and wondering how long the blacksmith would keep them waiting, her father walked restlessly to and fro, lashing the side of his leg with his whip, and peering into every hole and corner. As he penetrated into the back of the smithy an

unmistakably appetising smell was perceptible, and, led by the nose, he promptly followed it up to its source in the pan over the charcoal fire with an eager sniff and short laugh.

'What the deuce have you got boiling away here, young fellow? Hey? 'Pon my word I never smelt anything so savoury in my life! Does your mother do her cooking here with a charcoal fire, like a regular *cordon bleu*?' and Mr. Featherstone bent over the open pan sniffing audibly.

Quick as lightning, fearful lest his father should drop in upon him before he had removed all traces of his work, or Mr. Featherstone's curiosity probe the mystery, Richard lifted the pan from the brazier and looked round distractedly for a place of concealment.

'It's not cookery, sir, it's something nicer —I mean more interesting than anything to eat. But I've no business with it in here, and I don't want my father to see it,' and the boy stood a picture of distress holding the pan

from which curled upwards the tell-tale steam.

'Hey? What? Have you been poaching, young fellow; been poaching? It's a smell to draw a hungry man by the nose, but you'll find poaching's a dangerous game; a dangerous game!'

'Indeed, sir, it's nothing to eat; it's only an experiment I'm trying with a few bones——'

'Now, young fellow, you're fibbing! You're not bound to tell me what's in the pan unless you like, but don't go out of your way to tell lies! A few bones never made a smell like that since cooking first was known.'

'Don't tease the poor boy, papa,' said Margaret, laying her hand on Mr. Featherstone's arm. 'It's something he wishes to hide from his father. See, he wants to carry it away,' for Richard was making for the door to hide the guilty vessel in the garden at the back of the smithy. He shot a grateful glance at the young girl, and as he did so rushed straight into his father's arms, pan in

hand, upsetting enough of the scalding contents on his feet to make him start with pain, in spite of his thick boots.

'What devilry is this you're up to now? I can't leave you a couple of hours to mind the place but you're up to some mischief or other! I'll pay you out for this, you young dog!' he shouted, unwittingly naming the contents of the unlucky pan, when he merely thought he was abusing his son, and he raised his arm to strike him, but the boy wrenched himself free from his grasp.

'Do what you like afterwards, but you shall not strike me before the young lady!' and Richard's face was white and set as he stooped to pick up what looked like a boiled rabbit that had been shaken out of the pan in the collision with his father. But before he could touch it, Sam Atherley, with a curse, stamped on it with his heavy boot, and broke all the delicate bones, and there was an end of the boy's hope of possessing a puppy's skeleton of his own preparing.

'Oh, my bones! my dog's beautiful bones!' cried the boy, scarcely able to keep back his tears.

For a moment Mr. Featherstone's sense of humour got the better of his good-nature, and he laughed aloud.

'So that's what you were so secret about, young fellow! Nobody would have known anything about it if it hadn't smelt so good. Cleaning the bones, were you, to set up a dog's skeleton of your own? But that's a confounded nasty trick of yours, Atherley, to serve the lad in that way! He's more of a medical student than a blacksmith. How comes a son of yours to have such a turn? Eh?'

'Medical student you call him, sir! I call 'im a good-for-nothing wastral, that's what he is!' growled the blacksmith, rolling up his sleeves and glaring vengefully at his boot, still smoking from the scalding brew that had fallen upon it. 'But I'll teach 'im to know hisself, and take the nonsense out of

'im with a strap till 'e's black and blue, afore 'e goes to bed this night! There, blow the bellows and be damned to you, can't you!' and Richard, burning with shame and rage to be spoken to so before Miss Featherstone, sullenly did as he was bid, and soon the fire roared up the wide chimney and the strokes of the blacksmith's hammer rang out loud and clear.

'I sha'n't stay in this place, papa,' whispered Margaret under cover of the noise. 'I hate that man, he's cruel to his son and uses horrid words,' and the young girl slipped out of the smithy to walk to and fro in the enclosure in front. She patted the nose of the grey cob, and then, going to the entrance of the courtyard, stood looking up and down the quiet High Street.

Richard watched her go regretfully. He knew what she said to her father as well as though he had overheard her words. 'She thinks we're no better than brutes, and no wonder if she does!'

Atherley's ringing blows fell thick and fast on the glowing iron, and the shoe was nearly shaped.

'I hope I've not got you into trouble, young fellow!' said Mr. Featherstone to Richard with kindly anxiety. 'Your father won't thrash you? Hey?'

'Likely as not he will, sir; but it doesn't matter, nothing matters!' for the boy was reckless with shame and sullen resentment.

'That's all nonsense, my lad, you can't play philosopher at your age!' and he shouted against the noise of the bellows, 'Is your father drunk, young fellow?'

'Nothing to speak of, sir,' replied Richard, looking up with a critical and experienced eye. 'You've nothing to fear for the pony; he works as well drunk as sober,' he added with a joyless pride in his father's skill.

The blacksmith worked on with knitted brows and compressed lips, that boded ill for the lad when he should be left alone with him. Mr. Featherstone felt thunder in the

air and said good-humouredly, 'Atherley, don't be hard on that boy of yours for his harmless experiment! Remember, you've been young yourself!'

The blacksmith paused as he was nailing on the pony's shoe, to look up with a scowl.

'I don't remember feeling no different from what I do now, no, nor acting different neither. I never set to a-boiling o' dog's bones! I'd more sense, I 'ad, young or old, and if it don't come nateral to 'im I've got to thrash it into 'im. I'll teach 'im to know as 'e's got a father!'

'A doubtful blessing, a very doubtful blessing!' said Mr. Featherstone to himself as the pony was led out of the smithy.

While Richard was unfastening the cob's bridle from the ring in the wall, Mr. Featherstone said in a low voice, 'I'm afraid you'll catch it to-night, young fellow; take this as a salve for a sore back!' and he tried to slip half a sovereign into his hand. But Richard, burning with blushes as he felt Margaret

Featherstone regarding him with girlish curiosity, declined the proffered gift.

'Thank you, sir, all the same, but I don't want the money. I can promise my father sha'n't thrash me to-night, no, nor ever again, that's certain!' and there came an expression over the lad's face as hard as that of the elder Atherley's.

'I meant you well, young fellow; I meant you well!' said Mr. Featherstone, slipping the coin back into his pocket, and he and his daughter rode out of the enclosure into the sunny High Street.

Richard stood shading his eyes with his hand as he watched the beautiful young girl pass from his sight, and printed her image in his memory. When he could no longer see her, he turned again towards the smithy, where his father was busily comparing the length and testing the strength of a couple of stout straps, and the lad knew very well what it was for. He had often felt the sting of them on his shoulders, but he vowed that he would

do so no more. Swift and straight as an arrow he darted out into the High Street, across the Market Place, and through a narrow alley leading into a maze of back streets down by the river; then, following the course of the stream, he ran like a hunted hare till he had passed the utmost straggling fringe of the little town. At length, by the road side, he came to a fir coppice, where, exhausted with running, he threw himself at full length on the ground, breathing in deep gasps.

The boy need not have run so far nor so fast. His father was not fleet enough of foot to have overtaken him even if he had tried to do so, and he made no attempt beyond following him shouting some fifty yards down the street. Then he returned to the smithy, drawing the strap through his horny palms, muttering to himself, 'Young devil! It'll suit me better to give it 'im after supper!'

But Richard's flight was not from his father only. All the pent up irritation and

hatred of his home life found physical expression in his passionate haste, as if the Furies were in hot pursuit. He was turning his back on the past, pressing towards a future filled with golden dreams of congenial work worthily achieved, and recognition of talents of which he had begun to be uneasily conscious. Within the last hour, when he had seen Margaret Featherstone and conceived himself degraded in her presence, thoughts that had floated loosely in his mind had knitted themselves together and taken shape in definite resolution. He would not submit to be beaten again for nothing by his drunken father, and to make sure of this he must run away from home. And he thought it all out as he lay there in the coppice, with closed eyes and still breathing heavily, with no one to disturb him and no sound heard but the sweet sighing of the firs overhead.

Richard determined to go to London, the ocean wherein more bright hopes have foundered than ever have sunk in the deep

sea. There he would be as completely lost to his father and severed from his life in Dormington as though he were dead and buried. What he should do when he had emancipated himself he did not know, but if ever he was to be anything better than the assistant of his drunken father in a trade that he detested he must run away, and that without loss of time. And the lad's face grew crimson beneath the smoke and dust that blackened it, as he thought of his father's treatment of him before Mr. Featherstone and his daughter. He grieved, too, over the wanton destruction of the bones he was so lovingly preparing, and the brutality and injustice of his father's conduct struck him as forcibly as if he had been a spectator, instead of an actor, in the scene. He would bear it no longer! Let his father pay a lad to help him in the smithy, and see if any hireling alive would submit to the thrashings his son had had to put up with, while there was a

magistrate to grant him a summons against his master!

'Mother'll be sorry when I'm gone, and that's the worst of it, for she's got enough to vex her without that, and I don't like to hurt her feelings,' Richard thought as he lay on the dry ground with outstretched arms idly plucking at the scanty grass. 'And I can't tell her where I'm going to, nor nothing about it, or father 'ud get it out of her and come after me. I can't help it. I vex her as it is. She doesn't like the things I care for, and she thinks I'm proud and look down on my father's trade. Reuben and the baby make her happier than what I do, but she'll be proud of me one of these days, when I'm a full-blown doctor, as I intend to be, see if she isn't!'

And Richard determined not to go home before he thought sleep would have overcome his drunken father, and the promised thrashing perforce put off till the morning. When he was sure that he was safe in bed,

he would creep quietly upstairs to his room, make a bundle of the few things he needed, and leave the house in the dead of night, and when his father rose in the morning he would find to his wrath that the bird was flown.

CHAPTER II

WIVES IN COUNCIL

> What do you think of marriage?
> I take 't (as those that deny purgatory),
> It locally contains or heaven or hell;
> There's no third place in it.
>
> WEBSTER, *Duchess of Amalfi.*

IT may be remembered that when Mrs. Atherley hurried away from the smithy, it was to seek comfort in a gossip with Mrs. Windybank, for her mind was more than usually disturbed by her conversation with Richard, and in whom could she confide so naturally as in the neighbour who knew her trials as intimately as though she dwelt under the same roof with her, and whose caustic remarks had often acted as a tonic to her feebler spirit?

Mrs. Windybank was busy ironing, and

Mrs. Atherley, after settling Reuben to floating walnut shells on a puddle in the yard, an enthralling pursuit that would relieve his mother of his fidgety presence for half an hour at least, entered the kitchen with her baby on her arm. Her wrinkled brow wore an air of mild perplexity, that caused her friend to enquire briefly, 'What's up now?'

'Oh, nothing more'n usual, only I'm a bit puzzled about our Richard.'

'What! 'As he took to drink too?' said Mrs. Windybank setting the iron sharply down on the stand. 'If 'e was my lad I'd give 'im a good thrashing and stop that game afore it was well begun! There's enough o' that i' your house a'ready, Mrs. Atherley!'

'No, it's nothing o' that wi' Richard, but there's summat of 'is father in 'im for all that. He's set hisself ag'in 'is father's trade; he says what ever else 'e is he won't be a blacksmith, and when he's made up his mind 'e's that obstinate you can neither push nor pull 'im,

as the saying is! I doubt there'll be trouble between 'im and 'is father over it, and I shall 'ave to put up with him same as I put up wi' my 'usband.'

'You do try my patience, Mrs. Atherley, with your puttings up wi' this and your puttings up wi' that, when you'd ought to teach your 'usband and your son to know theirselves! But you begun at the wrong end for that when you was married, more's the pity!'

'Ah! Mrs. Windybank, married life's a narrow path for two to walk in all their days, and when the man's i' liquor mostly, and hitting out like a mad thing, it makes it narrower than what it really is, for it ain't wide enough for quarrelling, nor argyfying, nor nothing, but only for jogging along side by side,' and she seated herself on a low chair by the fire with her baby on her lap.

'My word! If I'd a husband like yours I should ha' left 'im long ago!' said her friend, bringing down her iron with such force that

she smashed a pearl button on the absent Windybank's shirt front.

'When you've got the crooked stick you've just got to put up with it. We can't all 'ave good 'usbands, Mrs. Windybank, you must own and allow,' and Mrs. Atherley punctuated her remarks with a series of gentle pats on the fat back of the baby, who was bending over her hand, blinking drowsily at the fire. 'And us that's got bad tempered uns,' she continued, 'why, you may do somethin' with 'em by humouring 'em, same as if they was cross childern. Allays let 'em have the last word, they think a deal of it, and never contradict 'em, for they are not formed to abear it. That's 'ow I've managed my married life,' and Mrs. Atherley sighed.

'And a pretty time you've 'ad of it, too, with your ways o' managing!' said her friend in aggressive tones. 'And it 'asn't done no good to your 'usband neither, so fer as I can see, lettin' 'im 'ave 'is own way in everything, and trampling on you regardless!'

Mrs. Atherley was silent for a minute, while she laid the now sleeping baby across her lap, and then she spoke.

'I've had to think out things for myself like as well as I could, and I've learnt a deal since I was a wife, that when I was a maid I couldn't understand, nor shouldn't have believed if you'd told me. This world's all of a muddle, Mrs. Windybank, and neither you nor me can set it straight. I sometimes think as the Lord's made three kinds o' creatures in the world—men, women, and childern. Now we're women, you and me, we're women.'

'Aye, there's no call to contradict you so fer!' Mrs. Windybank admitted graciously as she went to the fire for a fresh iron. 'If you said no more than that there's no one 'ud wish to quarrel with you!'

'Well, what I've often thought is this,' continued Mrs. Atherley, puckering her brow in the effort to express herself clearly, 'as the menfolk and the childern is more like each other, than what we women is to either of 'em.

Both men and childern is thirsty and restless and werritting, and wanting to be amused all the time, and fond o' games, and makes more dirt and noise i' the house than what we do. They neither of 'em can't behave reasonable when they're ill; they gives 'emselves up for lost and runs us women off our legs waiting on 'em. But directly they feels a bit better they're up again, as cross as two sticks, and there's no managing of 'em at all,' and Mrs. Windybank gave a short laugh as though she recognised the truth of the picture.

Mrs. Atherley's brow had now become exceedingly furrowed with thought, but she held on bravely, for the pleasure of having a perfectly clear idea in her usually bewildered mind. 'Well, that's where the men and childern is like each other, but the Lord's made us women different from both of 'em, so it must be for a good purpose. And I think sometimes as we're 'ere to keep the peace. The men is set over us for masters like, and the childern is under us for rebels, so if we

can't try and smooth things a bit, we should be reg'lar crushed from above and below, between the 'ammer and the anvil, as the saying is.'

'You 'ave a poor sperit, that you 'ave, and I've often been ashamed of you for it; but I never thought to 'ear you stand up for it and like glory in it! You seem to think as wives 'as nothing to do but to make it easy for them as wants to trample on 'em, and make pincushes o' theirselves for them as enj'ys sticking pins into 'em! The men set over us for masters, indeed!' continued Mrs. Windybank, bristling with indignation. 'I don't think some'ow as Windybank 'ud say as 'e was my master! No! If there's any commanding to be done I must do it! Not but what Windybank's respectable. I'd say that for 'im anywhere. And childern being rebels, too! Not mine, Mrs. Atherley, awhile I keep the use of my senses and know 'ow to use a birch rod or a stick, according to the age and the imperance!'

'Why, if I'd 'ad your sperit, Mrs. Windybank, my 'usband would ha' killed me 'ears

ago! I seem soft to you, I know, but if you'd spent the best 'ears o' your life wi' a vi'lent, onreasonable man in liquor, you'd ha' tried as hard as I 'ave to make the best o' things; to bring some good out o' what's bad, and save your own soul if you couldn't save no one else's along with it. It's a queer topsy-turvy kind of a place is this world, and we've got to do the best we can and raggle on somehow. I don't think as us women can do better than just grease the wheels o' life and try and make things run smoother.'

Mrs. Atherley's sentiments filled her friend with such lively contempt she could hardly hear her to the end.

'So you call being trodden on, and sat on, and never 'aving the last word, nor the first blow, greasing the wheels o' life, do you? It 'ud try the patience of Job to 'ear you talk, and I don't wonder as your 'usband likes the company at the Barley Mow better than yours, though I'm your best friend as says it! You're the kind o' woman the men 'as in their 'eads when they say them nasty words about "a

woman, a dog, and a walnut tree, the more you beat 'em the better they be!" that's what you are!' said Mrs. Windybank angrily. 'If I don't see your master through the winder, coming up the street red i' the face wi' running, and cracking a strap in 'is 'ands like a cart whip, and swearing fit to make your 'air curl too, I be bound! What's he up to, I wonder?' and she craned her neck to watch him till he disappeared in the enclosure in front of the smithy.

Mrs. Atherley sighed as she gathered up the sleeping baby in her arms and rose from the low chair.

'It'll be somethin' up more than usual between 'im and Richard again. I must go 'ome and see what's the matter, for young fellows won't stand what a woman'll put up with,' and Mrs. Atherley called Reuben from manœuvring a fleet of walnut shells in the puddle, and, taking his grimy little hand in hers, walked slowly to her own door, not knowing what might await her there.

CHAPTER III

A LEAP IN THE DARK

A growing youth has a wolf in his belly.—*Proverb.*

Richard continued idly lying on his back in the coppice with his hands clasped under his head, tranquil now in mind and body. Gradually he ceased to watch the shifting flecks of blue between the swaying tree tops, the song of the birds grew faint and far away, and he fell fast asleep. How long he slept he could not tell, but the sun was set when he was waked by the application to his cheek of something moist and cool. He opened his eyes, to look full into those of his faithful spaniel Nance, who had followed her young master in great anxiety, and, having found him at last, was gently sniffing his face to enquire if all was well with him.

Richard clasped his arm round the dog's neck, then, springing to his feet, shook the withered grass from his clothes. 'Good old girl! did you think I was lost? To-morrow you may look for me as much as you like, and you won't find me anywhere! I'm going away, old girl. I've made up my mind I won't stand another thrashing. I'm going to bolt, Nance!' and she looked up at her master with her head on one side as though she took in the meaning of every word, and wagged the stump of a tail that was much the worse for wear.

The lad's appetite was keen set by now, and his noon dinner felt to have as little connection with him as though it had been eaten by somebody else. He had a few pence in his pocket and might have satisfied his craving with bread and cheese at a public house, but he would have so much greater need of his pennies later on that he could not think of parting with one of them. Therefore he buttoned his jacket tightly round his lean

waist where was the seat of hunger, took his mind off the subject of food, and, whistling his dog, set forth on a long tramp, to pass the time till he might safely go home.

Unpunctuality was not one among Sam Atherley's many irregularities, and Richard knew that in accordance with invariable habit he would leave the Barley Mow, after his evening visit, at the stroke of ten. He knew, too, exactly what he would say when he reached home and found that his son had not returned, that he would go to bed with many a curse and growl determined to give him the promised thrashing in the morning, and his mother would be sitting up for him deprecating his father's wrath.

The clock in the Market Place had clanged out the hour of ten, the upper storeys of the houses were dotted with lights in the bedroom windows, the downstairs regions barred and shuttered, when Sam Atherley staggered silently home, for it was not his wont to shout or sing when he was drunk

He was never hilarious in his cups, and his naturally sour and ungenial temper was not mitigated, but enhanced, by drink. 'Richard knows as I'm a man o' my word, and when I've said a thing I stick to it,' he muttered to himself with drunken pride as he set foot on the shallow step that seemed to him a yard deep, lifted the latch and reeled into the kitchen.

His wife looked up from her work with a timid glance as he entered, snuffed the long wick of the candle and went on with her darning.

'Where's the lad, where's Richard?' asked Atherley fiercely.

'Nay, it's no good asking me, I don't know! I've not set eyes on him since I left 'im in the smithy, when Mr. Featherstone and the little lady come along.'

'Young dog, not come 'ome yet! Damn him, I'll have decent ways in my 'ouse! No son o' mine shall take to late hours! I'll sit up for 'im if it's till two o'clock i' the morning,

I will, for I've promised to thrash 'im and I'm a man o' my word,' and he spoke with proud rectitude. But it was mere empty brag; his drunken eyes burnt with sleep, he sat down in the big chair and his head sank on his breast.

'You go to bed and leave things be till morning,' suggested his wife, hoping by gaining time to spare Richard, for who knows, she thought, but he may forget his anger against the lad when once he goes to sleep? Atherley nodded his heavy head a second time before he made any reply, and then said, as he pulled himself up by the help of the chair, 'I don't mind if I do; I shall give it 'im 'eartier after a good night's rest, so you can tell 'im what he's got to expect for 'is breakfast,' and he stumbled up the narrow staircase to bed.

Mrs. Atherley's heart yearned over her boy, as her tears fell on the sock she was darning. The candle on the table burnt dim and unheeded, with a big 'thief' at the end of the long wick, when the door opened softly,

and Richard entered the kitchen, looking weary and excited, followed by old Nance, foot-sore with wandering with her master.

'Is he in bed?' he said, jerking his head in the direction of upstairs.

'Yes, he's been gone a good half-hour, but 'e's very bitter against you, my lad; very bitter.'

'That's an old story, mother,' said Richard, throwing himself in the chair that had served his father for a halting-place on his staggering journey bedwards, 'and I'm about tired of hearing it.'

His mother sighed. 'You was right to stay out late, Richard; it's saved you for to-night, but your father's promised to give it you in the morning, and when 'e's made up his mind mad dogs can't turn 'im—he'll do it, my lad, as sure as you're alive, and I can't 'elp you,' and the poor woman looked at her son with brimming eyes, that differed only in colour from the faithful spaniel Nance's.

Richard gave an impatient shake of the head and a short laugh.

'Don't you fret about me, mother. Father won't thrash me no more. I'm getting about tired o' that kind o' pay for my work. Can't you find me something to eat? While we've been talking away about what's never going to happen I'm sick with hunger; it's more'n ten hours since I've tasted a morsel o' food.'

Mrs. Atherley rose at once, blaming herself for not having thought of it before, wiped her eyes, and went to the larder in quest of supper for her son. It was the very diversion best suited to stir her sad thoughts.

'I might ha' seen as you was worn out wi' hunger when you come in, my lad. I'll get you summat to eat as quick as can be,' and she set half a loaf of brown bread, a piece of Dutch cheese and an onion before Richard, and he fell to with voracious appetite and infinite relish.

When he had eaten steadily in silence for some minutes, he looked up at his mother sitting near him, resting her head on her hand, regarding him intently, with eyes full of unspoken solicitude.

'Do go to bed, mother; you're very tired, and I'm all right now.'

'Yes, you're all right now, my lad, but your father won't let you be in the morning, and I can't 'elp you no more than the dead,' and she added fretfully, plucking the hem of her apron, 'I can't think what you've done this time to make your father so mad with you! You'd ought to ha' known better by now not to put 'im about so.'

'Don't you fret yourself, mother. It's between father and me, and if you mix yourself up in the row, you'll find yourself between the hammer and the anvil. I can't tell you nothing about it, but I promise you he won't beat me in the morning, so you may go to bed and be easy,' and Richard put his arm round his mother's shoulder, a most unusual

demonstration for him, and kissed her twice.

A soft smile came over the care-worn face. 'Well, if you've 'ad your supper I'll go then, though how you'll get yourself out of this fix I don't know. You're a good lad, Richard, and if there was more justice i' the world you'd have a father as knew it, my lad,' and still smiling softly the weary mother left the kitchen and groped her way up the dark stairs.

No sooner was Richard left alone than he took up the candle and went to the larder to make an examination of its contents on his own account. It was a lean larder, and a shabby, as became that of a drunkard's household. His mother had given him of her best. There was nothing on the shelf but the heel of a stale loaf and a bowl of milk, with the cream just rising on the surface. He set down the candle and, taking the bowl in both hands, raised it to his lips, when he set it down again untasted. He remembered the

milk was for little Reuben's breakfast. But the bread he had no scruple about finishing, and water would do as well as anything else to wash down his second edition of supper. For the craving of a healthy boy of sixteen after a ten hours' fast is not lightly appeased, and though he did much in a short time, the state of the larder, and not his own sensations, compelled him to leave off with an appetite.

When Richard had gathered up every morsel of cheese and crumb of bread that mouse or sparrow could pick, and deftly carried them to his mouth on the point of his knife, it was half-past eleven, and he had important work to do. To-night was the turning-point of his life. He stood at the parting of the ways, and it lay with himself to decide which path he would choose. The one he had so far trodden led straight to the easily attainable, and entirely unattractive, goal of moderate success in a trade he detested, to a repetition of his father's life in Dormington,

minus the drunkenness. The other path, rainbow-tinted with hope and imagination, stretched grandly into the unknown, fraught with boundless possibilities and appealing to him to strike boldly into it with all the strength and vigour of his youth.

The sound of his mother's footsteps overhead had now ceased for some time, and the house was silent as the grave. Richard took off his boots and crept softly upstairs, to the small, low-ceilinged room next to his parents', where he and little Reuben shared the same bed. To-night, when he wished to be silent as a burglar, every inanimate object seemed gifted with noisy powers of expression. The hinges groaned when he opened the door, and the bolt shot with a rusty scrape as he fastened it. The boards creaked under foot, as he never remembered them to have creaked before, and when he set the candlestick on the chest of drawers, to his overstrained hearing it seemed as if he had put it down with a crash. Nothing short of the crack of doom

could wake his father from the depth of his drunken sleep, yet he cast apprehensive glances in the direction of the door, as though he expected him to burst into the room in one of his furies, like Giant Despair ready to slay poor Christian and Faithful.

'I'm as nervous as a girl!' Richard said contemptuously, as he sat down on the foot of the bed and wiped the moisture from his brow, while he listened to the reassuring sound of his little brother's breathing, regular as the ticking of the clock in the kitchen below.

The chest of drawers under the window contained the boy's scanty wardrobe, from which he selected the few things necessary for his flight. It did not take him long to make up his mind on a subject offering no alternative choice, and in a few minutes he had tightly rolled up his Sunday suit lined with a change of linen, after the manner of a veal olive and its stuffing. Into the heart of the bundle, as an after-thought, he thrust a small Prayer Book, the gift of his mother, bearing his name

on the fly-leaf in her poor chaotic writing A choking sensation came in his throat when he thought of his mother, and therefore, boy-like, he resolved to think of her as little as possible. She would be proud of him one day, and that must make amends for the pain he was causing her now.

The bundle of clothes knotted up in a blue cotton handkerchief and set on the one chair in the room, Richard proceeded to unlock the top drawer of the chest, containing treasures dear to him as jewels to a woman or gold to a miser. He kept it under lock and key from a wholesome dread of little Reuben, who, if he climbed on the chair and put his fat, mischievous hand in among the frail bird's eggs and fine mouse bones, would work ruin comparable only to that of the proverbial bull in a china shop.

He took up an egg shell delicately between finger and thumb and held it near the flame of the candle, and the light shone through it softened, as by a porcelain shade. Next he

looked admiringly at his collection of tiny bones of birds and mice, clean and white as ivory, each labelled with its proper name, where he had been so lucky as to find out from a book what it was called. Then he tenderly turned over a number of botanical skeletons of his own preparing, blanched ghosts of leaves that had once waved on the bough in sunshine and wind, but that now, in the chill beauty of death, remembered no more their 'green felicity.'

Richard looked farewell to his treasures; he closed the drawer and was about to lock it, when he paused and left it open after all. 'The little chap's welcome to 'em,' he said to himself. 'They've made me happier than anything else here, but I've done with my life in Dormington, and p'r'aps Reuben 'll find he cares for the same things as I do. And if he doesn't, why it'll please him to smash 'em up, and get his own sort o' pleasure out of 'em, so he'll enjoy 'em anyhow.'

Lastly, Richard counted his money, and

found that he was master of his destiny to the extent of three shillings and ninepence, current coin of the realm. It did not strike him as an absurd and inadequate sum for his capital. It was the utmost he had ever possessed, and he felt rich when he remembered stories of poor boys who had gone up to London to seek their fortunes without a penny in their pockets. It even seemed to him that if your pocket is ultimately to be filled, it should begin by being empty, as the best possible state for receiving the good gifts to be poured into it.

Then he looked round the familiar room for the last time. He had not slept in any other, and ever since he could remember his waking eyes had opened to the light streaming through the white dimity curtain drawn across the window at the foot of the bed.

But he had done with it now, and where his eyes would open next in the morning he neither knew nor cared, as long as it was far enough away from Dormington, so bitter had

his home become to him. He stepped softly to the mantle-shelf where were two small photographs of his parents, and by an involuntary action, more transparently truthful than words can be, he revealed his inmost feelings unmistakably. He pressed his mother's portrait to his lips with a fervour and tenderness he had never shown to her personally. At his father's he looked with a scowl exactly reflecting that in the photograph, then tore the picture lengthways down the narrow, severe face, and a second time across the flat cheeks and long upper lip, and threw the pieces in the grate, but he put his mother's portrait in his breast pocket.

There was no one to say good-bye to but the sleeping Reuben, and Richard's frown relaxed as he stood, candle in hand, by the bedside, looking at his restless little bedfellow. The child had kicked off the blankets and lay with his shirt twisted into a rope round his chest—a naked baby, with dimpled arms outstretched, and a small leg thrown up with an

airy grace, like one of Lucca della Robbia's dancing boys. Richard remembered with compunction how he had grumbled to his mother, and begged her to let Reuben sleep by himself, for it was like sleeping with a windmill in full sail when the child took to dreaming, and lashed out like the figure on a Manx penny, all legs. Well, there would be room enough for him now, and drawing the blanket over him, only to be kicked off again by the restless little sleeper, he passed his hand across the boy's brow, whispered 'Good-bye, little chap,' and slipped silently out of the room.

Something pulled strangely at his heart as he crept on tip-toe past his mother's room. He leaned forward, candle in one hand and bundle in the other, pressed his lips to the door, and turning away crept silently down-stairs.

Lightly as Richard trod in his socks Nance heard him, and was waiting for him at the foot of the stairs, wagging a welcome with her

stumpy tail. When she saw him put on his boots her delight was extreme, and he had much ado to keep her joy within the bounds of silent demonstration. She forgot that she was footsore and weary, and life became unexpectedly delightful now that there seemed a prospect of sudden midnight walks with her dear master. But Richard motioned her to be quiet and lie down on the hearth.

The clock was on the stroke of twelve, as, swinging his bundle sailorwise over his shoulder on the crook of a stout stick, he put out the light and softly opened the front door. The night was still and dark, the moon had not yet risen, and Richard paused on the threshold of the home in which he was born before he closed the door behind him and cut himself adrift from all the landmarks of his life. His last thought was of his mother. He looked up at the window of the room where she was sleeping, unconscious of the trouble the morrow would bring. 'I'm bound to go, mother; I can't stay here,' he muttered, as he

pressed his cap firmly on his head and strode out into the darkness. As soon as he was clear of the courtyard in front of the forge, the echo of his steps on the paved street seemed to be telling all the town that he was a runaway, and he expected doors and windows to fly open, with eyes to recognise and hands to waylay him as he passed by. But soon he grew accustomed to the sound of his strong boots, waxed bold, and added loud whistling to the noise he was already making, walking at a pace that carried him in a short time beyond houses, pavements, and lamp-posts, and fairly launched him in the open country.

Richard was used to walking in the dark, and strode fearlessly on through black lanes, where a townsman would have stumbled at every step. He met not a single soul on his lonely way, but a farmer overtook him driving from Dormington, and breaking the silence of the nigh with enormous lung power. He was singing boisterously, 'The fox jumped over

the 'edge so 'igh, and the 'ounds all arter 'im go-o-o!' When the last notes of the jovial song with its accompanying rattle of wheels had died away in the distance, nothing was heard but the inarticulate sounds of night, a 'going' in the tree tops, and the multitudinous murmur of dry grain rustling in the fields.

Richard had now turned his back on the lanes and directed his steps across the fields towards the railway. His plan was to avoid Dormington station altogether, and at a point about a couple of miles beyond the town to climb the embankment, and, taking the up line for his guide, follow its course and walk to London. It would prevent all chance of losing his way and wandering wide of the mark. The journey itself would cost him nothing, and he looked to his three and ninepence halfpenny to find him food and drink during its course. How long it would take him to walk the hundred and thirty odd miles from Dormington to London he did not

know. He would rest when he was tired, sleep at night under a haystack, or in a barn as he might have the luck, and then pursue his way by the side of the line, his unerring guide to his destination. When he reached London most probably he would be penniless, but he saw no further than his journey's end—that was the goal in view. If grim difficulties awaited him there, so he believed did great deliverances, for Richard was at the age when nothing seems impossible and the thought of hardship is stimulating instead of depressing.

The boy scrambled up the embankment in the dark, and hitching his bundle on the crook of his stick snugly over his shoulder, set out at a swinging trot and with a light heart towards the great unknown. The moon had now risen, and in her soft light obscured by passing clouds, the glint of the worn and polished metals at his feet was visible, but the three rails beyond he could not see. He had only to keep steadily to the left

walking between the line and the telegraph posts that followed its course, to run no risk of being cut down by a passing train.

The night breeze wailed in the wires over head, sounding mournfully as an Eolian harp, and the boy's limbs grew heavy and weary as the fatigue of the last twelve hours crowded upon him. He could scarcely keep his eyes open. He shifted his bundle from one shoulder to the other, and then swung it by his side as the weight grew heavier. He tripped over every inequality in the ground, and began to look eagerly for the lights of Yarnley Junction, though he knew that he could not see them for a couple of miles yet. His steps dragged wearily, and, stumbling as he went, he caught his foot against the rail, and only saved himself from falling by bounding forward on the permanent way between the metals. By this time the moon was hidden in cloud and the line ran through a deep cutting, so that in the darkness he did not perceive the mistake he had made.

On Richard tramped doggedly, planting his feet more surely, when, at a curve in the line, a white light suddenly shone in his dazzled eyes, a huge dark outline looming above it, and the express bore down upon him with the roar of a hurricane. He had barely time to spring aside when it rushed by with a wind that blew him flat against the side of the cutting, in a shower of pebbles and gravel thrown up by the terrific speed and weight of the train, while the ground vibrated under his feet. It was gone in an instant, shrieking like a Banshee; the light from its long chain of carriage windows merged in one flash, and nothing was visible but two eyes of red fire growing less every moment.

Sick and dizzy, Richard shut his eyes and leaned his back against the cutting, and then, with knees that trembled under him, felt about in the darkness for his cap and bundle. The bundle lay uninjured between the metals where he had dropped it when he leapt aside,

and his cap, that had been torn from his head by the wind of the rushing train, swung from a bramble that scratched his face as he was feeling about for it.

Strong as the boy's nerves were, it was with difficulty that he stepped out fearlessly again in the dark, even when he was once more secure by the side of the line. The distant shriek of an engine made him start violently, and when he could not see the metals he stooped and felt them, to make sure that he was by them and not between them.

At length the lights of Yarnley were plainly visible, and, wide-awake and treading warily, Richard kept to the path of safety. It was now raining sharply and a chilling wind had sprung up, but he pressed forward, for he was not yet ten miles on his way. He reached the junction, where the up and down lines were duplicated many times, and there were great stores of coal, and sidings with goods trains of tarpaulin-covered trucks

drawn up in them, spending the night very comfortably. He avoided the station, and climbing over the wall of the coalyard, went round by the back of the signal box to regain the line beyond it. The man on duty was looking out of the door at the top of the flight of steps leading into the brightly lighted room, where he presided over a row of steel levers controlling the destiny of all railway travellers passing through the junc tion, and he it was who so lately sent the express rushing down upon Richard's path.

Fearful of being observed Richard kept well out of the light and went into the siding, intending to get on the up line again as soon as the signal man returned to his work, when a bright idea suddenly struck him. It was raining heavily, and he was cold and tired. Here was a goods train, with a long row of trucks snug and waterproof—what was to hinder him from creeping in among the packages and boxes under the tarpaulin into a place of rest and shelter? It was too dark

to see which truck looked most promising for his purpose, and he spent a weary time climbing up by the wheels, and fumbling in the dark under the heavy coverings, in search of one not too closely packed to afford him space to lie down in.

At length, when he was about to despair of finding what he required, by great good luck he scrambled into a truck that was partly filled with casks of earthenware standing on end, with space between them where he could stretch himself on his side, and sit up for change of position. With a sigh of relief Richard dropped the heavy tarpaulin over the place where he had climbed in, flung himself down among the casks, making a pillow of his bundle, and the hard truck felt soft to his aching limbs as any feather bed. And in black darkness and silence he fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER IV

RICHARD FALLS ON HIS FEET

Sudden resolutions, like the sudden rise of the mercury in the barometer, indicate little else than the changeableness of the weather.—HARE.

Whoever has sixpence is sovereign over all men—to the extent of sixpence; commands cooks to feed him, &c., &c.—to the extent of sixpence.—CARLYLE.

'LIE still, Reuben, can't you; you restless charvy!' shouted Richard under the impression that his irrepressible little bedfellow was practically illustrating the activity of his dreams. 'Be quiet I tell you!'

But the sharp nudge of the elbow that accompanied the words failed to produce the usual effect of a drowsy howl followed by a momentary lull, and the bed continued to shake under him with a mysterious rumbling, thumping sound.

Richard sat up and rubbed his eyes. He looked for the light of dawn glimmering through the window at the foot of the bed, but all was black darkness. He stretched out his hand to feel if Reuben was near him, but instead of touching the child's moist hair, his hand struck against a cask. In an instant he remembered where he was and laughed aloud. While he was fast asleep the train had left the siding, and he might now, for all that he knew, be a hundred miles on his way—or out of it, as he happened to be travelling north or south. He raised himself and crept on hands and knees among the big casks to the side of the truck, lifted up a corner of the heavy covering and peeped out of his hiding-place. It was not an inspiriting sight that met his eyes. Yesterday's warmth and sunshine had departed like a dream. The morning was grey and wet, and the train, uttering now and then a dismal, prolonged whistle, rumbled slowly along a flat meadowland wrapped in mist, through which loomed

ghostly the heads of pollard willows, indicating the course of a winding stream.

Richard had never before ventured twenty miles from his birthplace, and he was unable to hazard a guess as to where he might be, but it was clear that he was not in his own neighbourhood, the character of the country told him as much. He leaned out of his travelling bedroom and turned his head to right and left, and before and behind him stretched a chain of trucks covered with tarpaulin sheets humped up by the packages under them into strange fantastic shapes, and black and shining with rain. There was not room for him to stand upright among the casks, and the shaking of the loosely coupled trucks made his breakfastless stomach sick and faint. He turned up a flap of the heavy waterproof covering to let in air and light, and lay down again at full length on the bottom of the waggon.

The rumble and thump of the wheels grew rhythmical to the boy's ear, and he

jolted along for miles to the tune of 'Rosalie the Prairie Flower,' ground out with exasperating emphasis and repetition. But gradually, as the pace slackened the time grew slower and slower, the wheels hammered, with vast deliberation, 'Light of the prairie home was she!' when a series of short, smart concussions passing from truck to truck, the entire length of the train from the engine to the guard's van, gave him severe warning that they were coming to a standstill. Several times the maddening manœuvre was repeated. Each truck gave its neighbour before and behind an ill-natured shove, expressive of the will without the power to smash it, when Richard peeped out again and had just time to read the word 'Oxford' as the train crept through the station, before he was thrown backward among the casks by the next concussion.

The train drew up in a siding for the engine to take in water, and during the delay Richard would have liked to look out and

about him, but the fear of detection overbore his natural curiosity. He had to be content with knowing where he was, that so far every turn of the wheels had been taking him nearer to London, the place of his desire, a piece of luck beyond likelihood or anticipation. There was nothing for it but to lie hidden till the end of the journey, or wait till the train stopped in some place where he could get down unperceived and take to his legs. When the train was once more in motion he boldly threw back his curtain and enjoyed a view of the spires and domes of Oxford, while a church clock near the line struck eleven, and he was borne southward.

Richard's frugal supper of the night before was forgotten long ago, and for many a weary mile of the slow progress hunger mastered all other feelings, and he ceased to beguile the time by watching the country unfold itself in changing panorama before his untravelled eyes. But gradually, as houses began to be thickly sprinkled over the landscape, and

paved streets to take the place of green lanes, in spite of empty stomach and aching head, he knelt up, and, resting his elbows on the side of the truck, watched with thrilling interest the strange transformation of the effacement of the fair country by the encroachment of a vast and grimy city.

For half an hour before they reached Paddington, as the train rumbled through interminable suburbs, he thought again and again, 'London! At last we're going to stop!' and still to his surprise it went on its way, thumping and whistling, till he feared it was bound for some place beyond London, which it would only pass through on the way to its destination. As they drew near to the great city the air was thick and murky—it was summer when he left the country—but here there was nothing in the sky by which he could have guessed the season of the year. The houses were darkened with smoke, and stood so close together Richard wondered how people could live in them, at least if

they were free to choose, for to him they looked like prisons. He thought they must be approaching a very big junction; the lines were so multiplied, and trains followed each other in such quick succession that, remembering his narrow escape of the previous night, he expected to be inevitably run into and smashed. But at length the train reached its destination in safety and steamed into the goods station, where, after a faithful repetition of the shattering concussions that had attended its stopping at Oxford, it came to a final standstill.

Richard peeped out discreetly from under his curtain, and, seeing a number of porters about, thought it wisest to leave the train by the side furthest from the platform, and he endeavoured to creep across the bottom of the truck with this intention. But he could not squeeze himself between the big casks that blocked his way, and had to crawl back again and trust to luck in seizing the right moment for escape. He had not long to

wait. Most of the porters were busy unloading a train that had come in before his, others were working with their backs towards him, and now was his opportunity. Quick as thought Richard swung a leg over the side of the truck, grasped his stick and bundle in one hand and stood on the axle of the wheel, stretching out a leg behind him as a feeler for the ground, when unexpected help was afforded him. A strong hand grasped him by the collar, hastening his descent considerably, while a loud voice said:

'Hallo! Is this the way you young country chaps come up to London without paying your railway fares?' and he thought that he had fallen into the hands of the police. But when he twisted his head round in his tightened collar to look at his captor, he did not wear a blue coat as he expected. On the contrary, he was clad in green corduroy, he had a frank, sailor-like face, with grey eyes, and though he used strong language and ferocious threats, the lad saw

in an instant that he had not to do with a dangerous man.

Richard's lucky star was in the ascendant that day. He had travelled all the way to London without spending a penny on the way, and the first person with whom he was brought into contact was that rare being, a man who remembered that once upon a time he had been a boy himself. Furthermore, he had not forgotten that he had run away to sea when he was younger than the truant before him, and as he recalled these things he blustered out more threatenings, and gave Richard a hearty comprehensive shake.

'You young devil! I've a good mind to hand you over to the police for cheating the company!'

Richard ducked his head in a vain effort to wrench himself free from the man's iron grip, for it is a disadvantage in argument to be held as in a vice by your opponent.

'Come now! Who have I been cheating travelling in a goods train, I should like to

know? You don't issue tickets for folks to travel in trucks, or I'd ha' bought one. You could but ha' spoken so if you'd caught me out travelling in a first-class carriage without a ticket. If the railway company's hard up I don't mind giving 'em a shilling to carry on with, but it 'ud be a deal too much to pay for the accommodation I've had in that truck! I'm all cramped with squatting among them casks, and bruised till my bones'll be sore for a week! You don't couple the trucks half tight enough on your line. I shall write to the newspapers about it!'

The corduroy-clad porter grinned at the lad, and as two or three men had paused in their work to watch them, added in a low voice: 'Look 'ere, you young limb! I know all about you same as if you'd told me yourself. You're a runaway from 'ome, that's your game, and no business of mine, but it is my business not to overlook your defrauding the company——'

'Haven't I just told you I'm not defraud-

ing the company, nor anybody else neither?' said the boy with another impatient twist of the head and shoulders. 'How slow some folks is to understand!'

'Can't you keep quiet, you young fool, or you'll get into trouble? If I don't settle this 'ere with you now out o' hand, it's a question of the police. But 'ere's a chance for you! I'm going to ketch you a clout o' the head—I'm the company's servant and I'm bound to do it—and mind you holler like a good 'un, so as my mates can 'ear I've done my duty if any questions is ast, and then cut away as fast as your legs'll carry you!'

'All right!' was the cheerful reply, and the porter lifted his arm with an appearance of praiseworthy zeal, and brought his fist down with a whack on the boy's head. Richard received it with a howl as requested, that was in reality an inarticulate 'Thank you!' to a friend in need, and, the comedy being played out, he ran away with all his speed. The porter made a feint of giving chase,

when justice was supposed to be appeased, and he stood for a minute watching the boy's flying heels, and his verdict was, 'That young fellow's got imperance as well as pluck; he'll get on in the world, he will!'

Oh the disenchantment of the first half-hour in the crowded, muddy streets of London; those very streets that, in his childhood, Richard had believed, on the assurance of those older and wiser than himself, to be paved with gold! For his unknowing steps wandered through endless squalid streets in the slums of Paddington, full of pawnbrokers' shops and marine-store dealers, with public houses sandwiched in between them and gin palaces at the corners. But drink was not in the boy's line, though such a neighbourhood would have been a land of Goshen to his father if he had been on his travels. Richard was hungrily looking out for some place where he could buy food, when he lighted upon an opportune cookshop with steaming peas-pudding in the window. He entered

joyfully, and ordered sausages as well as pudding, in as lordly a manner as though the shillings in his pockets were pounds.

The master of the shop, who served him, a greasy man in an apron that had once been white, had seen many a fine appetite blunt its edge before it came to the fourth sausage and third serving of pudding. But the big country lad ate as if he had never seen food before, and when he called for his sixth sausage he thought it wise to ascertain if his customer was solvent by reminding him that they were twopence each. But his orders were peremptory: 'Bring 'em, if they're fourpence, till I tell you to stop!' For Richard could do nothing till his hunger was appeased, and as he did not know when he would sit down again to a plentiful meal, he would make sure of it then if it cost him the half of his fortune. It was eighteen hours since he had eaten a mouthful, and the stomach of a healthy, growing lad is, even in these days of slack authority, a master who will be obeyed.

When Richard had consumed food and drink to the amount of one shilling and sixpence, his head once more was clear and steady, and he was able to take a vivid interest in the new world in which he had fallen, without feeling much anxiety about the future that lay blank before him. He wandered aimlessly along the streets, standing still to gaze at everybody and everything that attracted his attention, and looking into shop windows till, by degrees, he won his devious way into a better part of London on the north side of Oxford Street. The country boy was overawed by the size and number of the palace-like houses, and for the first time since he set out on his travels he felt truly lonely.

The abounding tokens of great wealth, such as his mind had no conception of, oppressed him with a sense of his own insignificance and loneliness. He wondered if the people who lived in those splendid houses ever had troubles like his; if harsh fathers,

downtrodden wives, and unhappy sons dwelt in them. And he decided with the promptness of ignorance that trouble could not easily penetrate those massive doors and thick walls, and that, when he was a rich man, which every poor boy dreams of becoming, he would live in one of these palaces and ask his mother to share it with him.

In the meantime a big house near Hyde Park was all one with a castle in Spain, his immediate want being employment of some kind, no matter what so long as it was honest and put food into his stomach and money into his pocket. Richard knew no trade but the blacksmith's, from which he was flying as much as from his furious father, and at present he felt as if he would take a turn at starvation before he would seek his old work. He wanted to learn some trade that would keep him for the next few years, when, with a sturdy faith, he believed he should be able to follow his natural bent. As he trudged wearily along the endless streets, it struck

him that he was not in a part of London where things are made but sold, and he looked in the shop windows at the goods displayed, that seemed to have nothing to do with him. He saw no factories of any kind.

As he was sauntering slowly along the Edgware Road, he suddenly caught sight of some promising words written on a sheet of paper in a draper's window, that seemed as if they might solve the present difficulty. 'Errand Boy Wanted.' Errand boy! that would suit him exactly! It required no knowledge of a trade to be an errand boy. Nothing was wanted but ordinary intelligence and extraordinary strong legs, and he could answer for it that he possessed both qualifications, and thus emboldened he entered the shop, and offered himself as the errand boy required.

A sickly, effeminate-looking man, with hair plastered to his head with pomatum, was standing behind the counter measuring pink ribbon with a yard measure. He paused in

his lady-like occupation to look up at the sturdy lad, as he stood before him, cap in hand, grasping his stick and bundle. To his cockney apprehension there was something extremely ludicrous in the appearance of the stalwart country youth, and he asked him sarcastically if he could oblige him with anything in the ribbon or feather line.

'No, sir, thank you, I'm not a customer. I've seen your advertisement in the window, and I've come to offer myself for the place.'

The master of the shop tittered in an irritating manner, and glancing towards his assistants to secure an admiring audience for his wit, said, 'Oh, that's what we owe the honour of a visit to, is it? Any boy that takes my situation must be smart and know his w'y about town, and that 'ud 'ardly be you, I fancy!'

'Can't say whether I'm smart or not, but give me a couple of days and I'll find my way about town as well as any other lad,' Richard replied stoutly.

'People wouldn't understand you when you ast them where you was a-going, not till you'd learnt to speak Henglish,' said the draper, with an elegant flourish of the pink ribbon, and feeling very witty before his young ladies, who were staring rudely at the country boy, and wishing the jackanapes they walked out with on a Sunday afternoon had half such a pair of shoulders.

'If I don't speak English, I know what good manners are for all that,' he said, looking round scornfully, 'and I thought that the master of a shop like this should ha' been a gentleman, but I was mistook. When I've lived in your London a bit longer, I shall know more about it,' and he left the shop with a sullen dignity that for the moment quenched the tittering behind the counter.

'Confound that ape among the ribbons!' thought Richard, as he turned into the street again. 'No more drapers for me! Blacksmiths rather, if it comes to that! I'll see if they want an errand boy in any of the

chemists' shops. That 'ud be more in my line than a place stuck full o' women's fallals, where they speak mincing cockney and don't understand good English when they hear it!'

And without waiting for advertisements in the windows Richard offered himself as errand boy in at least a dozen chemists' shops, and though no one was in want of his services, he met with civility, occasionally mixed with a word for his good, as when he was told he had done a foolish thing in coming up to London without securing employment beforehand. When he began to perceive that no one wanted his services, he offered an inducement and a bribe in the shape of unpaid labour for the first three months. Only give him food and lodging, and he would serve any master in any honest calling for a quarter of a year, but even on those terms no one cared to employ him.

In several of the shops where he had

applied he was asked his name, and he had frankly replied 'Richard Atherley,' but now, as he tramped along, he thought, 'If I'm going to be unlucky it sha'n't be in my own name. It's plain to be seen that if I get a job at all it'll be a poor one, and I don't want them at home to find out anything about me till they can be proud of me. I'll stick to the Richard, I shouldn't know myself without that, but other folks 'ud know me by my second name, so I must change it. Father might p'r'aps get wind somehow of me, and find me before I'd done anything worth doing. No; I've gone clean away, same as if I was dead, and they mustn't be able to trace me nor nothing,' and he began turning over in his mind all the family names he knew. The list was not a long one, and he soon came to an end of it, and then he looked above the shop windows for suggestions, to see if he could find one that he liked well enough to adopt as his own. But the lad was hard to please. Some names were too fine for

workaday purposes, while others were too mean to exchange for the name of Atherley, and he was beginning to think he would have to invent one, when a tradesman's cart drove rapidly past, so near to the curbstone that he started aside, as he did so reading on the back of the cart in bright, yellow letters, 'William Dare, Boot and Shoe Maker,' and his mind was made up on the spot.

'Dare! That's the name for me! A plucky name and no nonsense about it! I'm Dicky Dare, Richard Dare next time anybody asks me, and a thundering good name too!'

Richard's wanderings had led him down the Marylebone Road, through dreary sunless streets of the sixth magnitude compared with the great thoroughfares by which he had entered them. He was walking slowly along a crowded, narrow street, when he stopped before a chemist's window gay with an attractive display of large glass bottles filled with brilliant-coloured fluids, and having above the door, in gilded letters, the name Peter Colling-

wood. It was a cheap shop doing a large ready-money business, where faded, shabby women, bringing medicine bottles under their thin shawls, came for another pennyworth of the stuff that quieted the cough at night, and brought their pining babies to be prescribed for by Mr. Collingwood, whose customers regarded him as a full-blown consulting physician.

Everything connected with surgery interested Richard, and he gazed spell-bound at a revolting display of extracted teeth piled up in a corner of the window, as an advertisement and proof of the chemist's skill in dentistry. Next came plasters and bandages of every description, claiming and receiving his closest attention, glass dishes heaped with pills, and huge bottles with gilded tops filled with golden boluses as big as bull's eyes. After a prolonged inspection, when he had exhausted the contents of the one window he went on a voyage of discovery to the other, where, between bowls of cough lozenges and a

tasteful display of respirators and knee caps, he beheld a sight that kindled his brightest hopes—a sheet of writing paper reared up against an infant's feeding-bottle, on which was written, perhaps the most abrupt sentence in the English language, 'Boy Wanted,' not 'Errand Boy,' as the draper's advertisement had defined him; there was no qualifying adjective whatever. There was a pleasing vagueness about it, calling up exciting visions in Richard's mind concerning the nature of the duties the boy might be expected to fulfil. Perhaps he might even have the delightful task of dressing the window committed to him, and he peeped into the shop.

Two men were standing behind the opposite counters, and Richard saw at a glance which was the master and which the man. The assistant was a gawky youth with abnormally large red hands, and a complexion that did not respond to the application of soap and water. Even at that moment, big with fate for Richard, he thought if the young

man's hands were like beef in summer, what must they be like in frosty weather? At the back of the shop he caught sight of rows of shelves laden with porcelain jars, labelled, like volumes of the encyclopedia, with strange abbreviations of their contents. In the middle of the shelves was a mirror-covered door, leading straight into the domestic privacy of Mr. and Mrs. Collingwood.

As Richard entered the shop once more to try his fortune, he shot a keen glance to right and left, and then his eyes rested on Mr. Collingwood, a thin, middle-aged man in spectacles, wearing a white apron, and busy at the moment bandaging the hand of a small child whimpering in its mother's arms.

The ill-favoured assistant pushed aside the pestle and mortar with which he was pounding noisily, and, leaning forward, resting thumb and forefinger on the counter till his elbows stood up like a grasshopper's, asked the newcomer what he wanted.

'Nothing, thank you, till the gentleman

can speak to me,' whereat the assistant resumed his pounding with vigour, and Richard set his bundle on a chair and stood listening to what the chemist was saying to the mother of his little patient. Evidently he was a kindly man, for he slipped a lozenge into the child's mouth squared for a cry, when it immediately contracted into a round and compact form, indicative of silence and suction. As he dressed the little hand, the chemist remarked to the mother in tones as suave as though she had paid two guineas to hear them in a consulting-room of a fashionable doctor, 'It is evident that the child has been allowed to play with some sharp instrument, and in consequence has given himself a severe cut. A knife is certainly not what the faculty would recommend as a safe plaything for an infant.'

'Well, I declare, if that isn't what my 'usband says! "Sar' Anne," he says, "whatever do you give the boy the carving knife to pl'y with, so long as there's a bit o' broken

crockery 'andy, or anything else as is safe!"' and the astonished mother paid her threepence for surgical bandaging and departed.

Richard promptly took her place at the counter as Mr. Collingwood slipped the coppers into the till, looking mildly over his spectacles at the boy meanwhile.

'There's a notice in your window, sir, "Boy Wanted," and I've come to see if you think I should do,' and Richard stood cap in hand at the threshold of fate.

The chemist now looked at the boy through his glasses instead of over them, and the assistant became all ears, large red ears, and ceased pounding to listen.

'Yes, certainly, I want a boy; but I want a good boy this time, if such a thing is to be had. My shop boys have given me a great deal of trouble.'

'If you'll take me, sir, I'll try not to give you any trouble. I'll do whatever you tell me, whatever my duties are,' and he looked earnestly in the chemist's mild face.

'Your duties would not be heavy, but they would have to be despatched with what we term punctuality and precision,' said Mr. Collingwood in tones as polite as though he were addressing a customer.

'Could you tell me what they would be, sir?' and the boy drew nearer and laid one of his large shapely hands on the counter.

'Well, to begin with, you would have to rise very early in the morning, sweep out the shop, and light the stove in cold weather, take down the shutters and keep the windows clean, run errands, take out medicines, put up the shutters at night, and—and please Mrs. Collingwood. Most of my boys have failed to do this—I fail to do it myself occasionally—and they have had to leave in consequence. Some, indeed, have been excellent boys, but rude to Mrs. Collingwood, I regret to say, and I have been obliged to part with them.'

'Whatever else you find me, sir, I think I can promise you I shouldn't be rude to a woman.'

'To a lady you mean,' said the chemist gently. 'We term Mrs. Collingwood a lady,' and it was as mild a rebuke as the good chemist ever administered.

The red-handed assistant covered his ungainly mouth with a corner of his apron to keep himself from laughing outright, and Richard feared he had spoilt his chances by his unlucky remark.

'I'll do my best to please the lady, as well as yourself, if you'll engage me, sir. I'm very strong and there's nothing here that I couldn't do easily, and, though I've only just come to London, I'll undertake to find my way about town as well as that fellow there giggling behind the counter,' and Richard nodded over his shoulder in the direction of the assistant. The chemist raised his eyes and observed mildly, 'Mr. Jakins, your levity——' when the youth dropped his apron and resumed his pestle and mortar work with furious energy, and a face like a thunder-cloud.

'Only try me, sir,' pleaded Richard; 'try

me. Pay me as little as you like, I'll be content and serve you willing and hearty, if you'll teach me about the drugs and things in the shop. And there's teeth in the window,' continued the boy eagerly; 'if you'll teach me the use of the dentist's tools, and how to draw teeth, there's nothing I wouldn't do for you in return.'

Mr. Collingwood gave a little gasp of astonishment.

'This is extraordinary; most extraordinary! I must have had some twenty boys in the course of my experience, and not one of them has evinced the slightest inclination to discriminate between the nature of cod-liver oil and Epsom salts, or cared to know whether teeth were extracted from the head or the heels of the patient!'

'It's the one thing I care for, everything about surgery and operations!' said Richard earnestly. 'Look here, sir, if you'll only teach me all I can learn in your shop, I'll ask you for nothing but food and clothing for a whole

year. I'll serve you night and day with a hearty will if you'll only teach me!'

The chemist liked the look of the boy, and his manner interested him; but there was someone else besides himself to be consulted before he dared to come to any decision, and he murmured softly, 'I wonder what Maria would say to it all?'

The quenched assistant looked up from the pestle and mortar as Richard repeated, with the intensity of a prayer, 'Only give me a trial, sir!' when the mirror-covered door among the jar-laden shelves flashed open, and Maria herself appeared upon the scene, and a sharp voice said:

'You're ten minutes late for your tea again, Collingwood! I should ha' brought you a cup myself, but it don't look well when customers come in, and I don't fancy the taste of it all among pills and plasters. Jakins, you might have the manners to stop that row with the pestle and mortar while I'm speaking to your master; I can't hear the sound of my own

voice!' and the pestle dropped from the big red hand as though it had received a blow on the knuckles.

Mrs. Collingwood was a dark-haired woman, with wiry ringlets and a puckered brow, roving black eyes and drawn-in corners of the mouth, and Richard felt that until that moment he had not seen the real master of the establishment.

He took the measure of the lady at once, and making his best bow, said, politely, 'I'm asking Mr. Collingwood to employ me as his shop-boy, ma'am, and, if he'll teach me about drawing teeth and drugs, I don't want any wages for a twelvemonth!'

Richard's good looks, that the chemist had not noticed, but which the assistant had seen at a glance and hated him for, stood him in good stead in the eyes of a woman, and after surveying him from his comely shock of hair to his uncouth country boots, Mrs. Collingwood's features began to work, and she looked at her husband.

'Oh, Collingwood, can't you see it for yourself? Why didn't you send for me at once? The boy might ha' gone without me seeing 'im, and what a thing that would ha' been! I never see such a likeness! It's our Willy come back again!' and Maria burst into tears. The assistant grinned, and, turning his back towards the counter, rubbed his large red hands together as though he were enjoying himself very much.

But Richard opened his dark eyes wide. Was it possible that he had already offended the susceptible lady, on whose account so many boys had been dismissed from her husband's employ?

'Compose yourself, my dear,' said the chemist, who knew these scenes by heart, and he offered his wife a bottle of smelling salts that stood conveniently near him on the counter; but she continued to steal furtive glances at Richard, and then covered her face with her handkerchief, as though to shut out the painful sight.

'You had better wait till Mrs. Collingwood feels equal to seeing you again,' said the chemist in a mild voice, and he and the afflicted lady retired together through the mirror door into private life.

'What on earth's the matter with the woman!' exclaimed Richard in amazement, looking at the reflection of his own astonished face where Mrs. Collingwood had stood a moment before. 'What on earth's the matter with the woman!'

'What's the matter with yourself, you mean,' retorted the ugly assistant, with an unnecessary contortion. 'I've a mind to wear a curly wig myself, and paint my face, and see if the missis won't take a fancy to me and think I'm like Willy too'—when customers entered the shop, and Richard could only wait as he was bidden and hope for a favourable solution of the mystery.

But mystery there was none, and Mrs. Collingwood's extraordinary conduct was accounted for by a plain fact. Some years pre-

viously the chemist and his wife had lost their only child. It had been a grievous trouble to them, but one from which the father, by lapse of time and by constant occupation, had entirely recovered. The five short years in which his home had been brightened by the presence of his little boy, had become in memory a mere episode in his life. He had mourned his loss heartily and wholesomely, but when he had enlarged the shop and engaged an assistant qualified to make up prescriptions when he was driving Mrs. Collingwood out in a hired phaeton, he felt a renewed interest in life. The world went on very much as it had done before Willy Collingwood paid it a five years' visit, and his father saw no reason why, because he was again childless, as he had been for the greater part of his life, he should grow slack in the performance of his duty, and generally reproach Providence.

It was not so, however, with his wife in losing her child. She was not a woman of

warm affections, but she had suffered the utmost that her narrow nature could suffer, and, worst of all, she had lost her occupation and had no longer any object of absorbing interest. Moreover, she was deprived of the one creature absolutely under her despotic sway, for though her husband was usually submissive, there had been occasions on which he had ventured to assert himself, while Willy was at that convenient age when overt rebellion is most appropriately dealt with by the application of physical force. She still grieved bitterly, and reproached her husband as a heartless monster for finding much to be thankful for in a world from which her Willy had departed.

Mrs. Collingwood's grief had long since passed through the acute phase, and become chronic at the luxurious stage in which she slept soundly, ate her food with discriminating enjoyment, took the keenest interest in her new bonnet, and yet was ready to burst into tears, embarrassing to the beholder, at any-

thing and everything recalling Willy to her remembrance.

Her husband was unable to discover by what obscure mental process objects different from each other, and all of them totally unlike Willy, recalled him vividly to his mother's mind. It was natural, perhaps, that she should look at every baby in a perambulator and be struck by its likeness to her little boy; but it was in the highest degree perplexing to Mr. Collingwood, when he took her to the play, to have her burst into tears and whisper between her sobs, 'I can't bear it, Collingwood! I don't know what it is, but that old gentleman in the stalls, when he uses his handkerchief, does so put me in mind of our Willy!' And when he took her to a Volunteer Review in the Park she wept at the sight of the reviewing officer, a stout, red-faced man on horseback, issuing the word of command in a series of short, staccato barks. He struck Mrs. Collingwood as just such another as her Willy would have been had he

been spared to fifty, instead of five years of age.

Of course, every lad from five to twenty had a look of Willy about him, but it was the special and striking resemblance borne by the russet-cheeked, well-grown youth to the rickety, pale-faced departed, that overcame Mrs. Collingwood the instant she set eyes upon Richard.

The chemist was used to these outbursts of feeling, and they were generally mixed with considerable asperity of temper on the part of the chief mourner. No sooner, therefore, were Mr. and Mrs. Collingwood alone in the parlour than his wife turned and chode with him.

'Don't tell me you've been a father and can look on that noble face and not see as it's our Willy over again! Where are your eyes and your heart, and your feelings as a parent?'

'But, my dear, I was under the impression that Willy was very fair and small, altogether different in size and colour from this boy.'

'Ark at you!' said Maria contemptuously drying her eyes. 'As if likeness had anything to do with size or colours, indeed, or any such nonsense! Likeness is something you see in faces, and if you don't see it, it's your own fault because you've got such a hard heart. As if a mother wouldn't know who was like her own child and who wasn't! I'm ashamed o' you, Collingwood. You engage that boy directly; it'll be a sort of a comfort to see a face as puts me in mind o' Willy, though my comfort's the last thing you'd think about. And look 'ere, Collingwood, that boy don't take his meals down in the kitchen along o' Mary Anne and the black beadles; I must have that face at table with you and me and Jakins.'

'There'll be an end of all discipline if the shop-boy dines in the parlour,' objected the chemist, well aware with what a burst of indignation the proposal would have been met if it had come from himself.

'End of discipline? End of a fiddlestick!

That boy's got your own son's face, and you've got to behave according. Where are your feelings as a father? Go and engage 'im this minute, or I will myself!' and thus menaced by his wife, Mr. Collingwood called Richard into the parlour and made his bargain with him there and then.

When all arrangements were satisfactorily concluded the chemist said gravely, 'Mrs. Collingwood considers that you bear a certain resemblance to our son who is dead, that is why she was overcome at the sight of you, and I hope that you will endeavour to behave like him.' Though, truth to say, had Richard behaved like Willy such conduct would have been unbecoming in an errand boy, who is not expected to refuse to do as he is bid, or scream himself black in the face when he can't have what he wants.

Mrs. Collingwood graciously consented to allow her husband to teach the shop-boy dispensing and tooth-drawing, but would not let him be taught in lieu of wages, as the lad in

his eagerness had himself proposed. 'It 'ud be like keeping our Willy without pocket-money,' she said, laying her hand on Richard's shoulder and terrifying him lest she should kiss him.

'And now what's your name, my lad?'

'Richard Dare, ma'am,' and, as he uttered his new name for the first time, the colour mounted to his face.

'That s not a name as anyone need blush for, I'm sure. I'd an uncle once myself, a very respectable party, as kept a shop in the Mile End Road, and 'is name was Richard, and there's something quite venturesome about Dare. I like it,' and Mrs. Collingwood smiled graciously on the new shop-boy.

CHAPTER V

A HOME TRAGEDY

'Twas pitiful; 'twas wondrous pitiful.—*Othello.*

Early in the morning after Richard's flight, his mother was waked by little Reuben crying loudly in the next room. Her husband was wrapt in the stupifying sleep of drunkenness, and she might have shouted 'Fire!' in his ear and he would not have heard her, but she was roused in an instant, and, throwing a shawl over her shoulders, hurried to the child.

'It's Richard making 'im cry, I know. I wish he wouldn't be so sharp with the little 'un,' and she opened the door prepared for a querulous remonstrance with her eldest son, when to her astonishment she found Reuben alone in bed crying, between his sobs, 'Where's Dicky; where's brother Dicky?'

Mrs. Atherley looked about her in dismay. No trace of Richard was to be seen; his clothes were gone and the chest of drawers stood open. It shot through the mother's heart that her darling, the boy she was so proud of, had run away from home rather than submit any longer to his father's harsh and unjust treatment. She understood now what he meant when he had assured her so confidently that his father would never thrash him again. But as hope will not suffer itself to be quenched at once by unwelcome certainty, she strove hard to think he might possibly be in the kitchen, or have risen early to go to some work of his own in the smithy.

Mrs. Atherley did not stop to dress, but hurried downstairs as she was. The morning sunshine was streaming into the kitchen in slanting rays from above the closed shutters, showing the poor remains of Richard's supper on the table, but no Richard was there. The dog lay on the hearth looking up with sad,

intelligent eyes. She knew all about it, and when Mrs. Atherley opened the door through which the spaniel had seen Richard go out into the wide world, Nance sprang up and gave a bark that a fellow dog would have understood, but that her mistress failed rightly to interpret. The anxious mother hastened to the smithy, though her heart told her that it was on a vain quest. She opened the upper half of the door and let a stream of sunshine into the dark smithy, only to find, as she expected, no trace of her son.

Slowly Mrs. Atherley returned to the house and upstairs to little Reuben, who by this time had forgotten his trouble and was standing barefooted on the chair by the chest of drawers, breaking Richard's collection of birds' eggs with speed and precision. His mother whisked him off the chair and had him in bed in a moment, with both his fat little hands full of broken treasures. 'You naughty boy, you! Leave brother's

things alone! Richard's gone away, and p'r'aps you'll never see him no more!' and she rocked to and fro on the edge of the bed and the tears ran down her cheeks. 'Where's Richard gone?' asked the child with round eyes. And 'Where's Richard gone?' echoed the mother's heart and lips for years to come, and no answer was given to the question, though she asked it of God and man.

The blacksmith's amazement as the day wore on and his son did not return, was so great that he was compelled to go thrice instead of twice to the Barley Mow, to talk the matter over with his boon companions.

'If ever there was a lad as was onlikely to turn linty and shirk a thrashing, it's our Richard, though I says it,' Atherley remarked over his gin and water. 'I could ha' taken my oath as he'd ha' come 'ome afore this and stood 'is strapping like a man, and I've often give it 'im pretty hot for fooling about wi' messes and things as he'd no business with,

and he's never cried out nor nothing. Such a father as I've been to 'im too!'

'Well, whatever you may ha' been you gone too fer with 'im this time!' said a candid listener who paid for his own drink, and, needing nothing from Atherley, was free to speak his mind. 'You gone too fer with 'im, that's what it is! He's had a deal more kicks than ha'pence from you, and 'e thinks 'e had about enough on it, so he's took French leave and run away, and small blame to 'im I say!'

'Is this a free country where a man may chastise his own lawful begotten son or is it not?' asked the blacksmith with dignity. 'But for all your talk you'll find as Richard'll come back to-morrow, and take 'is thrashing, and settle down to work in the smithy just as if 'e'd never played the fool, you see if 'e don't!'

But Atherley spoke thus certainly because his heart misgave him. He felt that the boy would not return, and that his neighbours would laugh at him, and he took another

glass, this time gin without water, and inwardly chafed and fumed.

Someone must suffer for this. If Richard had run away, there should be someone on whom he might visit his displeasure, and with instinctive and unconscious cowardice he thought of the weak woman at home as a convenient victim. 'The lad's always been too thick with his mother, that's where it is! They've laid a plot between them two to rob me of the lad's services, and she got me to bed last night a purpose, and started 'im off somewhere out o' my road, and she knows where 'e is, I be bound!' and he hurried home to have it out with her at once.

The Atherleys' front door was shut and all was quiet within—Reuben at school and the baby asleep in the cradle. There were cleaner kitchens and cleaner children than the gentle Mrs. Atherley's, for a touch of the shrew usually goes with a hawk's eye for fugitive dust and secretive dirt. But if the children were not always redolent of

yellow soap, their mother never greeted them with shrill volleys of scolding, or flew at them and shook them, and she was always ready to kiss the tears from a troubled and grimy little face. She was going about her house this morning more limply than usual, with eyes red with crying, when her husband entered the kitchen suddenly, leaving the door wide open behind him. He threw his battered hat on the table, and she saw at a glance that he was excited with drink. He began in loud, hectoring tones, 'Come now, you'd better say straight away where the lad's gone, for you know all about it! You and 'im 'ave laid your 'eads together to make a fool o' me, but I tell you I won't stand it; I've found out your tricks! Come now, where's Richard?' and he stepped towards her with a threatening gesture. 'Where's Richard, I say?'

'I wish I could tell you where he is! God knows, for I don't!'

'Let's 'ave none o' your profanity, missis!

You know as it was you as put the lad up to running away, he'd never ha' thought of it but for you. It's a woman's trick all over, and you done it! You 'elped 'im to run away from a father as was only doing his duty by 'im, and you know where 'e is now well enough!'

For the first time in her life Mrs. Atherley looked at her husband when he was in a passion without fear. Anxiety for her son conquered her natural timidity, and she replied quietly, 'If you say as I helped the lad to run away and that I know where he is now, you tell a lie, Samuel Atherley;' when the blacksmith's fist struck her a sledge-hammer blow on the breast, and, with a sharp cry, she fell senseless to the floor as Mrs. Windybank entered the kitchen.

'Oh, you big brutal coward!' cried the nimble little woman, flying at Atherley like a stinging wasp. 'I saw what you done as I past the window! I'm not your wife as I should be afraid of you! If you dare to lay

a hand on me I'll have the law of you. Stand back, I say! You sha'n't touch 'er, nor 'elp to 'eave 'er up nor nothing! Out of the place with you, and leave that poor martyr o' yours wi' me, and if you've killed 'er, you shall swing for it, as sure as I've breath to witness against you!' and the astonished householder was thrust forth over his own threshold, his own door slammed at his back, and the bolt shot by an alien hand before he knew where he was.

When Mrs. Atherley recovered consciousness, she was lying on the floor, a woman's arm supporting her, and her dazed head pillowed on a woman's breast. The feminine touch reassured her, and, looking up at Mrs. Windybank, she closed her eyes while large tears slowly coursed down her cheeks, and she gave a great sigh.

'Oh, I wish it was my last breath I was drawing!'

'And no thanks to that murdering bully of a husband o' yours as you 'aven't got your

wish!' said Mrs. Windybank vehemently. 'Of all the brutal things I ever see this is the worst!'

'He never would ha' struck me if he'd been sober; leastways, not so hard,' urged the poor wife. 'He never would ha' done it. God forgive 'im!'

'Don't you begin excusing of 'im or you'll 'ave me angry with you just now, Mrs. Atherley! And talk o' God forgiving 'im, indeed! There's a deal 'as to go before forgiveness in my opinion, and in general I'm right. There's got to be repentance, and never doing it no more, and speaking your mind plain, and telling folks straight out to their faces what you think o' their doings, before you get so fer as talk o' forgiveness!' and she moistened the now fainting woman's brow with vinegar and water.

Little by little Mrs. Atherley told her friend that her husband had struck her because he believed that she knew where Richard was, and had helped him to run away,

'and if he'd serve me like this, what wouldn't he ha' done to my poor lad if he'd stayed at 'ome for it?'

'And a deal better if 'e'd tried it on with Richard, Mrs. Atherley! He'd ha' give 'is father as good as 'e got, and serve 'im right! Richard's getting a young man now, and I see it in 'is eye as 'e wasn't agoing to put up wi' things much longer. Come now,' she added gently, 'can you bear your 'ead on this piller, and let me get up and put the kettle on, and then we'll see what the damage is, for it's 'urting you cruel bad I can see.'

And in a short time Mrs. Windybank had boiled the water and made a cup of nerve-shaking, blood-impoverishing tea, the poor woman's comfort in all troubles of mind and body.

'There, take a cup o' tea, my dear, it'll pull you together like and 'elp you,' and the little gimlet-eyed woman held the cup to her friend's trembling lips.

'What should we do without each other, us women!' sighed Mrs. Atherley.

'Aye! you may say that!—and now, as you've drunk your drop o' tea, let me see what the 'urt is,' and Mrs. Atherley fumbled in vain with shaking fingers at hooks and eyes.

''Ere, let me do that for you, you're all of a dither,' and she unfastened the front of her bodice, and found that the hurt was far worse than she had feared. It was a sight contrary to nature and abhorrent to humanity, the breast of a mother giving suck, wounded by the cruel blow of the father of her babe, and when Mrs. Windybank saw it she struck her hands together with dismay.

'Lord! 'ow could your 'usband do it! And 'im born of a woman too and fed at a woman's breast, though no one 'ud credit 'im with it! I doubt you're 'urt very serious, Mrs. Atherley. A doctor must see to this!'

'Not if it kills me, a doctor sha'n't see it, Mrs. Windybank! He'd ask who done it and I can't 'ave folks talking!'

'Ask who'd done it! Not he! Anyone with 'alf an eye 'ud see as your 'usband 'ad done it; nobody else in the world but 'im!' and the little woman's eyes flashed with indignation.

'Oh, don't carry on so, Mrs. Windybank, but just 'elp me up on the settle; I shall feel better when I'm off the floor, it puts me too much in mind of 'ow I come to be there.'

For the next few days Mrs. Atherley was in high fever and very ill, and Mrs. Windybank nursed her, applying old wives' remedies, that did their duty as they used to do in days before the art of healing was a professional mystery we call in the medicine-man to exercise on our behalf. Mrs. Windybank took entire charge of the household during the mother's illness. She weaned the baby, launching it upon a perilous course of grown-up fare with dismal results to itself, and sent Reuben to school with his face scarified with yellow soap and cold water. Anything that

she thought necessary for the children Mrs. Windybank did with pleasure, but it cost her a great struggle before she could bring herself to prepare Sam Atherley's dinner, and she only yielded to his wife's entreaties: 'If 'e don't 'ave nothing to eat at 'ome he'll go more'n ever to the Barley Mow. Do just bile 'im a pertater, do!'

In justice to the blacksmith one is bound to record that he suffered remorse for which no one gave him credit. He hung restlessly about the house, and when he growled at the bedroom door, 'O'w's Liz'buth now?' Mrs. Windybank replied tartly, 'Not out o' danger yet, nor won't be, not till you alter your ways, I'm thinking,' and she did not allow him to set eyes on his wife for three days and nights. When she was obliged to leave her patient to attend to her own house work, she locked Mrs. Atherley in her room and took the key away in her pocket.

When once Mrs. Windybank had consented to prepare Atherley's dinner, she

thoroughly entered into the spirit of it, and enjoyed herself immensely. It provided her too with a splendid opportunity of speaking her mind to the blacksmith and telling him plainly what she thought of him. She contrived to make his food both look and taste as unappetising as possible, and she spilt the beer over the bread, smeared the cloth with mustard, and upset the salt and vinegar with the best will in the world.

'And now set you down to your dinner, as I've been so kind as get ready for you just to oblige your poor wife, for if it 'adn't been for 'er you might ha' whistled for it afore I'd ha' stirred to cook it. Call yourself a man! Setting right end up on a chair eatin' off a plate's too good for you! Why, if everybody 'ad their dues you'd be summat or other going on four legs, as folks took and throwed their bones to when they'd picked 'em! I thought you wouldn't like me saying that! Swear away as 'ard as you like, it don't 'urt me; but if you touch me I'll 'ave

the law of you! I'm not your wife, as I'll let you know pretty soon if you lay a finger on me!'

The blacksmith's language was not good to hear. 'If you was my wife I'd break every bone in your body!'

'There you're talking o' what you don't understand, Sam Atherley. I'm not the sort o' woman as 'usban's knock about, for I've got a tongue i' my 'ead and I know 'ow to use it too, and if they've got fisses to 'it with, I've got nails to pertect myself with. No, the sort o' wife you dare to lay 'ands on is like that poor-speritted thing upstairs, for you're cowards, the pack of you. And now I'm going 'ome to give my fam'ly their dinner, and taking little Reuben along with me, and 'ere's your dinner afore I leave,' she said, clapping a dish of cold bacon on the table with a thump. 'And them's pertaters I've cooked for you with all the eyes left in 'em, as black as my shoe, and under-biled a purpose, and may they give you spassims is my prayer!' with which

grace before meat Mrs. Windybank caught up Reuben and departed.

Weeks passed by and grew into months, and still no Richard returned, and neither parents nor neighbours could hear anything of his whereabouts. In his sullen incommunicative mind, Atherley acquitted his wife of complicity in his flight, though he did not admit as much. He felt, too, that he had hurt her very badly for nothing, and for the future it was a fact useful to remember, that boys are safer objects for bodily chastisement than women—but one lives and learns. Though Atherley could not bring himself to admit that he had behaved like a brute, he knew it, and he never again used personal violence towards his wife. The man had self-control where he chose to exert it, and when he felt the evil spirit rising within him he would leave the house, if only to make himself so drunk he could be a menace to nobody. Also, he dreaded more than hell a second invasion of Mrs. Windybank, who had assured him that

if ever he hurt his wife again she would return to nurse her day and night till she was well ; so the peace must be kept at any price.

Sam Atherley had no idea how much he should miss his son, or, rather, he had not imagined the inconvenience to which his absence exposed him. No hired boy would submit to the beatings he had so freely bestowed upon Richard, who, moreover, had worked without pay, as he bitterly realised on a Saturday night when he grudgingly doled out a scanty wage to the stranger within his gates.

Atherley did not know that his son's disappearance was owing to Mr. Featherstone's unlucky visit with his daughter to the forge, more even than to the lad's deep discontent. His wounded pride and newly acquired sense of personal dignity, outraged in the presence of the beautiful young girl, had driven him away more than any fear of his father's displeasure. In the light of Margaret Featherstone's eyes he had become conscious of himself in a

manner he could not have defined, even if he had tried to do so. But the new feeling found expression in the determination to suffer no hand, whether that of his father or any other man, to be laid on him in bodily chastisement again. And he could not forgive his father for the vile and injurious words he had used to him in the hearing of Miss Featherstone.

CHAPTER VI

THE CHANCES OF WAR

Use every man after his desert, and who shall 'scape whipping?
Hamlet.

Richard Dare, as we must now call Richard Atherley, was grateful for the good fortune that caused him to fall, cat-like, on his feet, when he took his first leap into the wide world. But he had no mind to rest his claims to his master's consideration on the imagined likeness Mrs. Collingwood detected in him to the departed Willy. His own sturdy sense told him that a sudden unreasonable fancy is often the forerunner of an equally sudden and unreasonable dislike, and he endeavoured to make himself so necessary to the good-humoured chemist that, when his mistress lost interest in him, he might retain

his situation on the safer ground of his usefulness.

The red-handed assistant detailed to Richard instructive histories of previous shop-boys who had been dismissed for the involuntary offence of ceasing to remind Mrs. Collingwood of Willy. For, in addition to being intensely jealous of his favoured position in the house, Jakins hated Richard for his own sake, and imparted the knowledge of his predecessors' fate to him with a single-minded intention of making him uncomfortable, and imparting a sense of insecurity to his term of service, be it long or short. But the assurance of the uncertainty of his employment served his best interests, and found robust expression in a devotion to work and greed of learning that were a perpetual surprise to his master. Fearful lest his chances of improvement should come suddenly to an end, Richard threw his whole energy into whatever he did or learnt, and acquired as much practical knowledge in a few months as

might have been spread over a year had he been sure of staying so long in his present situation, and the praise his master lavished on him behind his back did not tend to ameliorate the assistant's feelings towards him.

Mr. Jakins was sensitive, and resented the presence of the shop-boy at meals in the parlour with Mr. and Mrs. Collingwood and himself, for if it was not, as the chemist said, subversive of all discipline, at all events it was contrary to custom and established order. But before long a nightly grievance in addition to the daily recurring one was added to Mr. Jakins's burden. The shop-boy had not been a month in the house before Mrs. Collingwood, for some purpose of her own, required his room, and moved him into the assistant's larger one, which she said was amply big enough for the two young fellows to share. Richard detested the arrangement as much as the assistant, but he held his tongue, being determined not to lose his situation through

any folly of his own, and at first he made some efforts to propitiate Jakins's ill-humour; but, finding that impossible, he became indifferent and left him to himself.

In the long winter evenings after business hours, at Richard's urgent request, Mr. Collingwood put him on a course of reading that he went through himself before he became a qualified chemist. He also taught him the art of bandaging and plastering cuts and wounds, and promoted him to the making of pills and the compounding of ointments, and very soon he was able to make up medicines from a prescription as well as Jakins himself. But the greatest joy of all was after he had repeatedly watched the chemist operate while he held the victim's head, he was one day allowed to extract a cabman's tooth, which he did triumphantly, without the sufferer suspecting that it was the youth's first experiment in dentistry. When the man had paid his shilling and left the shop, Mr. Collingwood beamed approbation on his pupil through his

spectacles, praised his nerve and aptitude, and gave him the shilling for his own. No recognition of skill, or reward that Richard received later in life, was as sweet to him as his master's praise or as precious as that first shilling fee.

On Sunday afternoons Richard had a few hours to himself, when, according to the state of the weather, he either went to service at the Abbey or set out westward in search of the country, which seemed to recede indefinitely as he grew foot sore in pursuit of it.

On a bright Sunday afternoon when he had been in London a year and had lost much of his rustic speech and appearance, he was walking to Putney, thinking of nothing so little as of the old days at Dormington, when an unexpected sight suddenly took him back to the smithy, and turned the sound of the church bells with which the air was full into the ring of his father's hammer on the anvil. A hansom drove by with Mr. Featherstone and his daughter in it, and the sight of the beautiful young girl who had unconsciously

decided his destiny when he first saw her, filled him with tumultuous excitement. She did not see him, nor would she have known him if she had seen him; but that did not matter. He had seen her, and that was enough, and he was filled with renewed determination to make his way in the world till he should become worthy of her notice. If it is in the power of man to shape his own destiny, the time would come when the blacksmith's son would meet Margaret Featherstone as an equal, and though she was now remote as the stars from the chemist's boy, they would yet meet without condescension on her part or presumption on his.

When Richard returned to the shop in the evening, the fervid feeling that possessed him illumined his face, and for the time being wrought a subtle change in his appearance. The red-handed assistant thought young Dare looked disgustingly handsome, and the dark shade of an incipient moustache, of which he was deadly jealous, had never been more

offensively apparent. Even an ugly face is rendered interesting when it becomes the medium through which the inner man shows himself at his best, but when a comely face is irradiated by strong, fine feeling, it effects a transformation akin to beauty that is perceived, though not understood, by the dullest observer.

Jakins was thinking of Richard, and of a discovery that he had made in his absence that he hoped one day to be able to use to his disadvantage. While he was out that afternoon he had taken occasion to gratify his curiosity with a minute examination of the contents of his locked drawer, in the chest in their bedroom. A key of his own fitted it, and Mr. Jakins had opened the drawer and inspected the shop-boy's meagre possessions with the thoroughness characteristic of unbidden research. He examined the little Prayer Book his mother had given him, with Richard Atherley written in her poor scribble on the fly leaf, and the assistant's eyes sparkled

as he read. He instantly jumped to the conclusion that as Richard was very reticent about himself and his family, this was his real name, and that he had assumed the name of Dare for some bad purpose, as Mr. Jakins devoutly hoped. It would be awkward, no doubt, to explain how he came to find out that his name was Atherley, so he contented himself with fixing it in his memory, ready to produce it on some occasion when it might prejudice his master against Richard, or at least lead the model youth into a maze of lies.

Mr. and Mrs. Collingwood were out, and the two young men supped alone in the parlour that evening. Richard was talkative and expansive; Jakins gloomy and sarcastic.

'I 'ope you don't think as that blue necktie o' yours suits you? for, let me tell you, it's 'ighly unbecoming!' he remarked, looking up from across the table at the silk handkerchief knotted loosely round Richard's shapely throat.

'Unbecoming is it? That's a bad job, for it's the only one I've got, and I must wear it, whether or no.'

'You can take off the necktie any 'ow, but you can't get rid so easy of that ridicilus appearance on your upper lip! Anyone 'ud think as you'd been trying 'air washes and lotions to force a moustache, for it never could ha' come natural at your age,' and Mr. Jakins spoke contemptuously, but yearning to learn the name of the invaluable hair-compelling agent that had produced the dark shade on Richard's upper lip. He had furtively tried many applications of the kind himself, with no other result than that of producing a chronic state of skin irritation, neither improving his personal appearance nor conducing to placidity of temper.

'You take an uncommon interest in my looks to-night, Jakins! You've told me more than the looking-glass has, for I didn't know I'd a moustache coming;' and he rose

to consult the small mirror over the mantelpiece.

'Hallo! You're not so far wrong, Jakins. I've either got a very dirty lip or it really is a moustache. Upon my word, that's what it is, it won't rub off, you see. Such as it is, it's come of itself; I know nothing about it,' and Richard blushed with delight.

'You know nothing about it, don't you? Ho! indeed, then I call it a disgusting piece of precocity!' remarked the red-handed assistant. The bitterness of his feelings must be excused, for Mr. Jakins was twenty and Richard only seventeen, and he had brought all the power of science to bear on his face since he was that age without producing a single hair on lip or chin.

In their double-bedded attic Richard often pretended to be asleep when the assistant came upstairs, and had in consequence been the unsuspected witness of dark mysteries of the toilet that tried his gravity severely. But to-night he was destined to see Mr.

Jakins perform a solemn ritual unlike anything he had ever beheld before. Richard had been in bed an hour, thinking too much of his unexpected glimpse of Margaret Featherstone to fall asleep, when he heard the assistant coming upstairs with unwonted quiet. He was proceeding with the utmost caution, and, when the stairs creaked, he paused for a moment before he put his foot on the next step. He opened the door like a burglar, and entered the room shading the light with his hand. Richard kept his eyes shut, and lay with his back to the door. Jakins softly turned the key in the lock, walked round to the opposite side of the bed and passed the candle to and fro before his face, almost near enough to singe his eyelashes. Richard bore the ordeal by fire without wincing, as the light shone blood-red through his eyelids. 'Fast as a church!' muttered Mr. Jakins as he turned away, and gave no further thought to the boy.

The assistant set the light on the dressing-

table, and produced from his pocket three short pieces of candle. These he carefully lighted, and having fixed the glass at the most convenient angle, set one on the top of the frame, and another on each side of it, and gazed at himself by the illumination with a melancholy glare. His next act was of a suspicious nature. He took a razor and stropped it hard for ten minutes, while Richard held himself in readiness to rise and pinion him if he attempted to commit suicide.

But Mr. Jakins's sole object, moved by jealousy of the shade on Richard's lip, was to urge on the growth of his dilatory moustache by a third attempt at a shave in the last four-and-twenty hours. But his face was so excoriated with former raspings, and sore from chemical applications, that he was obliged to lay the razor down with a groan and seek consolation in matters apparently unconnected with moustaches, though there was method in all that he did. He stealthily

crossed the room, opened a drawer, took out several bright-coloured neckties, and laying them before him on the dressing table, contemplated them with silent rapture. No young mother ever made more complete and thoughtful preparation for her expected babe than Mr. Jakins for the moustache that might occur now at any moment. He had a collection of silk ties of all colours in readiness to suit its style and harmonize with its probable hue. And he laid first one and then another against his sallow cheek to decide whether pale green or blue best suited his complexion, while Richard held the blanket to his mouth to keep himself from laughing aloud. Then Mr. Jakins produced from his breast pocket a new cork he had brought upstairs from the shop, and, burning it black in the flame of the candle, leaned forward, till he almost touched his reflection in the glass, and marked a pair of fierce moustaches with it on his hairless face, knotted a blue silk tie round his neck, precisely like Richard's, that had excited his

scorn at supper, and regarded himself with undisguised admiration.

Richard shook with suppressed merriment till he could bear it no longer. He threw the blanket from his mouth and burst into peals of laughter. For a moment Mr. Jakins seemed stunned, then, turning towards him a face of genuine fury that quenched the simulated fierceness of his burnt-cork moustaches, struck him a blow on the head with all his might. In an instant Richard sprang out of bed and grasped Jakins by the collar.

'That was a devilish nasty tempered blow, Jakins! I should have burst if I hadn't laughed out loud, and that's the truth. But, if you want to fight, wait a second while I get into my trousers and I'm ready for you!' But nothing was further from the assistant's desires than a fight with Richard.

'Fight you, indeed! I'd scorn the haction! I'll 'ave as little to do as I can 'elp with persons coming into other persons' 'ouses under false names! Call yourself Richard

Dare, do you? I don't believe you're Dare no more than I am. Your name's Atherley, and if you wasn't ashamed of it you wouldn't ha' took and called yourself by a name that's not your own!'

'You lie! I never was ashamed of my name, and I don't mind telling Mr. Collingwood how I came to call myself Dare. You've picked the lock of my drawer, and found my name written in a Prayer Book when you were prying about my things, and though I never thought much of you, I didn't give you credit for being such a mean cad as that comes to. I've always kept the key in my pocket, but I didn't know I had to do with a fellow that was up to such dirty tricks. Take that for your pains!' and Richard gave the assistant a knock-down blow. As he fell he made a clutch at the dressing-table, and dragged it down with him, putting out the lights and breaking the looking-glass with a tremendous crash.

In their excitement the young men had

forgotten that their room was above Mr. and Mrs. Collingwood's. The chemist and his wife, returned late from a supper party, had just come upstairs, when they were alarmed by a heavy fall overhead, that sounded as if it would bring the ceiling down. Mr. Collingwood stood for a moment pale and open-mouthed, while three alternatives presented themselves to his wife's mind to account for the hideous noise and commotion. It was either burglars, an earthquake, or the servant walking in her sleep; but before she could decide which it was, the chemist had rushed upstairs, and as she dared not be left alone, she promptly followed him. He tried the door of the room, and, finding it locked, shook it violently, shouting, 'What's the matter in there? Open the door at once!'

'In a moment, sir; we're in the dark. I can't find the door,' replied Richard from within. Then a hand was heard searching over the panel, there was a sudden turning of the key, the door was flung wide open, and

the light from Mr. Collingwood's candle revealed a scene of desolation The dressing-table and chair were overthrown on the floor, and among the broken fragments of the looking-glass Mr. Jakins, covered with candle grease, was picking himself up slowly and carefully, while Richard, half dressed, flushed, and defiant, stood holding the door open.

'What is the meaning of this unseemly disturbance!' said the chemist contracting his smooth brow into his version of a frown; when, catching sight of the assistant's burnt-cork moustache, that in the struggle he had smeared over his cheeks and chin, he could only gasp, 'Mr. Jakins, your face!' when his wife pushed past him with a scream.

'Oh, my looking-glass, that was my poor mother's when she lived at Ashford before she married again, and as she prized more than her best china, if it isn't smashed in a thousand bits! My word! whichever of you fighting ruffians did that shall leave in the

morning, if you'd lived 'ere a dozen years! Which of you did it?'

'Whichever you like,' said Richard defiantly. 'I knocked Jakins down, and he tried to save himself clutching at the table and upset the whole blessed thing.'

'You knocked Mr. Jakins down, Richard? What was that for?'

'He knows why, sir! He worked hard for it before I did it!'

Mr. Jakins, who was busy rubbing several very real bruises among a great many imaginary ones, spoke, interrupted by unmanly sobs. 'He flew at me for speaking the truth, sir, which I felt it my dooty towards my employer, sir. I charged 'im with 'is name being Atherley and not Dare, and because he couldn't deny it he knocked me down and half killed me, sir,' and the assistant gulped down his tears.

'Where's your handkerchief, you great lubber?' was Richard's sole remark after this statement.

'Oh, you young deceiving villain! Come 'ere under a false name, 'as he? That's a thing as my Willy 'ud never ha' done, not if it was ever so!' cried Mrs. Collingwood shrilly.

'Be quiet, Maria! This is my business,' said the chemist. 'Richard, is this true that Mr. Jakins says about you?'

'It's true that my name's Atherley, sir, but he hasn't told you how he came to find it out. He's picked the lock of that drawer, sir, or opened it with a key of his own, and meddled with my things! He found my name written in a Prayer Book I've always kept locked up, and I knocked him down for the dirty trick, and serve him right!'

'Oh, you wicked story, you! Do you mean to say as you came into this 'ouse under false pretences, taking me in with your likeness to Willy, and all?' screamed Mrs. Collingwood, regardless of her meek husband's rising displeasure at her interference.

'I came here under no false pretences,'

said Richard hotly. 'I had a right to call myself by what name I chose, and whether I'm like your Willy or not, I don't know, and I don't care a hang! I'll tell Mr. Collingwood why I came here under the name of Dare if he cares to know, but I'll discuss it with nobody else.'

'Collingwood, will you stand by and hear me spoken to like that? How do you know what sort of a serpent we've cherished in our bosoms under false names? I'm much obliged to Mr. Jakins for showing you up, I'm sure, and how I ever could ha' thought your dark impident face was like one as was pale and fair, and is no more, I don't know, not if I was to be put on my Bible oath I don't!'

For once in his life the chemist was a resolute man. He took his wife firmly by the arm and led her to the door. 'This is not your place, Maria! Go downstairs, and leave me to manage my young men myself,' and he pushed her on to the dark landing and turned the key upon her.

Mr. Collingwood was in great trouble. He saw that he would be obliged to part with the best, most promising, and useful boy he had ever had; one who might some day rise to be a chemist. And he had grown to like Richard, and grieved that he must part with him under painful circumstances. He would have forgiven the boy himself, but he knew that his wife would never do so. The broken looking-glass had settled the question once for all, and, besides, he no longer resembled Willy.

'Come downstairs with me, Richard, and explain this affair to me quietly,' said his master.

'Oh, sir, you're never going to leave me alone on the spot where I've been nearly assassinated to death, sir!' whimpered the assistant.

'Will you oblige me by not being an ass, Mr. Jakins?' said the chemist with considerable asperity. 'The best thing you can do is to get into bed, you are a good deal more frightened

than hurt,' and he and Richard left the room together.

In the privacy of the sitting-room behind the shop Richard told his master the truth without reservation. He told him the story of his life, of his running away from home, and why he had thought it safer to change his name. 'I kept the Prayer Book with my name in it just because my mother gave it me, safe locked in my drawer, where no one could get at it unless they opened it unknown to me, and I've thought for some time back that my things looked as if they'd been tampered with, and now I know it.'

'Well, Richard, nothing can excuse the way in which Jakins got to know your real name, and, by the way, I'm glad you told no lies about it, for he could not be sure that the name in the book was yours, he could only guess—but I wish you had told me yourself when you first came here.'

'I wish I had, sir! No one has been so good to me as you, or taught me so much.

I hoped to have become your qualified assistant before very long, and repay you a little for your kindness to me. Won't you overlook this folly, sir, and give me a fresh start?'

Mr. Collingwood looked kindly at Richard, but shook his head.

'If it rested with me, the only person who should leave this house would be Jakins. But you remember you were received here on terms I could not approve of at the time, as having no solid basis—your supposed likeness to Willy—and now the same power that took you up for no real reason is sending you away for no real reason. I'm sorry that after to-night's unfortunate events I cannot keep you; I wish I could.'

'But, sir, you are my master, I can't be answerable to anyone else! If you are willing to keep me, who can prevent me staying?' and the chemist looked mildly distressed.

'It was Mrs. Collingwood who engaged

you, Richard, and I deprecated it at the time, for the likeness to Willy never is strong enough in any of our shop-boys to make her overlook an offence for his sake. But you sha'n't leave me without my doing what I can for you. A friend of mine, a chemist in a large way doing a better class of business than mine in the City Road, Mr. Smith, keeps several young men and is in want of a junior assistant. I know he will take you on my recommendation; it will be better for you than staying on here; you will see a much larger business and be able to work for your examinations to become a qualified chemist. I'll give you a letter to him in the morning, but make up your mind under which name you go to him, Dare or Atherley.'

Richard was silent a moment before he replied.

'I would rather go as Richard Dare, sir, if I've satisfied you with my reason for taking the name. I feel the same as I did about it when I came to you. I don't want there to

be a chance of my father finding me till he can be proud of me.'

'Never fear, your father'll be hard to please if he's not proud of you someday! I wish you were my son! And now go to bed; to-morrow I shall give Jakins notice. I can fill his place a dozen times over, but it will be pleasanter for you and me if you will go without that formality. Shake hands with me, Richard—and, I say, no more fighting upstairs! Jakins won't touch you again,' he said smiling, 'but there must be no row. You quite understand?'

'Oh, sir, if I could have known that this fool's nonsense would be the end of my time with you, Jakins should ha' done what he liked, and said what he liked, and pounded me to a jelly if he'd the strength to, before I'd have had a row with him and smashed that miserable glass!' and Richard wrung his master's hand hard, and stumbled upstairs in the dark for the last time under the kind-hearted chemist's roof.

CHAPTER VII

A MODERN MIRACLE

Is there no way to bring home a wandering sheep, but by worrying him to death?—FULLER.

Make yourself an honest man, and then you may be sure that there is one rascal the less in the world.—CARLYLE.

WHILE Richard, absorbed in his own cares and work, gave only an occasional thought to the home of his childhood, changes were taking place there that would almost have prevented him from recognising either the house or its inhabitants. It would have been difficult for him to imagine his father a more complete drunkard than he had always remembered him, yet he had celebrated the loss of his son's services in the forge by a prolonged series of heavy drinking bouts, from which he emerged filled with black despair, only to seek relief in another and deeper

plunge into the mire. He had drifted from bad to worse, with the sole redeeming good point that, from the day when he so cruelly injured his wife, he had never again offered her personal violence. As to the pain of the bruised and wounded spirit within, to his gross vision the thing that was unseen did not exist, and as long as he allowed his wife to keep a whole skin, he felt that he did all that could be expected of him as a husband. But wife and children were ill fed and ill clad, and Samuel Atherley's name became a proverb of reproach even among old-established local drunkards, whose judgment certainly was not likely to err on the side of severity, and 'Soaking Sam' was the nickname he answered to with a scornful pride, as who should say, 'If I am a drunkard there shall be no doubt about it; I'll do the thing thoroughly.'

There seemed a finished completeness in the man's ungodliness in the neglect of every human duty and the stubborn choice of evil,

that led his neighbours to say, 'You could as soon turn the river out of its course as change Sam Atherley!'

But the good people of Dormington had demonstration afforded them that the age of miracles is not past, for a very striking one was wrought in their midst in the conversion of 'Soaking Sam' into a model of sobriety. Every circumstance of the event was common property; it was not done in a hole or corner, and Sam himself proclaimed it from the housetops.

It happened one Saturday when Atherley was as usual at the Barley Mow, that his drink made him more than ordinarily quarrelsome in less than the time generally required to bring about that result. The landlord glanced at the clock as Sam's voice grew louder and angrier, and said, 'Why, he'd oughtn't to be wantin' to fight not for twenty minutes yet! He's had a drop before he come 'ere in some low public, that's what it is; my liquors don't fly into a chap's top story all

in a minute, they mount a step at a time, quiet and respectable like. Order, order! I say. I'm master 'ere, not a blow do you strike i' my house one minute afore eight o'clock!'

But Sam Atherley and a lantern-jawed weaver, still more drunk than himself, had exchanged black eyes before anyone could interfere, and Sam, as the premature stirrer up of strife and law-breaker at the very moment when the commandment was being uttered, found himself roughly ejected from the light and warmth of the Barley Mow, staggering on the pavement outside in the cold twilight of a spring evening.

Half sobered by the violence and suddenness with which he was thrust out over the muddy threshold, he leaned for a moment against the doorpost and raised his bleared eyes to the clear sky where the pale stars were beginning to shine, and an overwhelming sense of degradation fell on him like a physical load, and bowed his head on his

breast. Sam Atherley had often been turned out of a public-house before, there was nothing new in that, and it stirred no other feeling than one of impotent drunken fury, with the will and the effort to kick down the door that was barred against him. But that evening an abhorrence of himself took possession of him, and a sudden vision of what he was contrasted with what he might have been forced a groan from his lips, still reeking with the foul spirit that befooled him. It was not pity for wife or children, nor penitence for years of persistent evil-doing, that wrung that deep groan from him. It was the clear realisation of a man degraded below the level of a beast, and that man himself, that pierced his very soul. His anguish of mind became well-nigh unbearable, and in another minute he would have made his way to the river and drowned himself had not help come from an unexpected quarter.

Sam Atherley suddenly felt a hand as

powerful as his own seize him by the arm, and a rough but kindly voice said, 'Hold up your head and be a man! Here's your hat as I've picked out of the kennel all covered with muck, a drunkard's hat the world over, and good enough for 'em, too. I've seen my own look like it many a score o' times,' and he gave an upward scowl and a futile pluck at his battered billycock, as he did so recognising his neighbour Tom Christie, a carpenter, at whom he had often laughed as he saw him go by in his Sunday black suit to Ebenezer Chapel. Atherley grunted a curse and his head sank forward again.

Christie slapped the old hat against the wall to get rid of the mud that plastered it, and continued, 'I should ha' known that hat for yourn anywheres. Both you and it is in a beastly condition, Mr. Atherley. I should be deceiving you if I said you wasn't. There's a pretty thing for a chap to put on his head,' he said, holding up the miserable object for derision. 'There's a mud pie to

carry atop o' your head, when you might ha' worn a stove-pipe hat a yard high, and been respected accordin'! Look 'ere, Mr. Atherley, you and this hat'll have to part company, if you're to walk in the narrow way. You come along o' me! There!—steady, steady—now you're all right, and we'll chuck that old drunkard's hat i' the midden, and you'll come to my house with me, and I'll lend you a tidy hat to go home in.'

Atherley merely uttered inarticulate sounds as of animal misery, and suffered Christie to guide his uncertain steps. They had not gone far before some boys espied them, to their great delight, and, hoping to have their usual diversion with a drunken man, followed them shouting, and the wit of the party cried out, 'Here's a go! If it ain't Soaking Sam and teetotal Tommy—gin and water taking a walk together!' Atherley turned for a blind rush at his tormentors, but again Christie's strong hand held him as in a vice.

'If you run a step after 'em, I'll knock you down! What he says is true and you've just got to put up wi' it! When you've left the drink, if anyone calls you Soaking Sam, then it'll be a lie, and you may go for 'im. You change your ways and they'll change theirs fast enough!'

'It's too late to change!' groaned Atherley.

'That it ain't! It's never too late to mend. I drank heavy myself for ten years, and if I'd listened to words like them I should ha' been at it still.'

'But I tell you the devil's got me too fast!'

'Got you too fast? Why, can't you see as he's give you the best chance to-night o' giving 'im the slip as ever a man had? Weren't you kicked out o' the Barley Mow where you'd a'most took root, and 'ud never ha' had the courage to ha' left it of your own will? Well, now, as you find yourself at the right side of the door—don't you mind 'ow

you come to be there—never set foot in a public again as long as you live, and you're a free man for the rest o' your days!'

Christie, still holding Atherley in custody, now took him up a narrow entry, and opening the front door of a small house led him straight into the light and warmth of his kitchen, where Mrs. Christie was ironing.

'Look sharp, missis, send the children to bed, and bring a bowl o' cold water. Mr. Atherley 'ere 'as 'ad one o' them accidents you used to know so well, and we must tidy him up a bit afore I take 'im home.'

Sam seated himself with a sullen, hang-dog expression, while the wife went for soap and water, and the husband reached down a small looking-glass from the wall and held it up before Sam's soiled and bloated face, as though determined he should drink the cup of humiliation to the dregs. 'Take the cursed thing away!' he said, striking out wildly as he caught sight of his purple face, cut and bruised, with mud on one side and blood on

the other; 'take the cursed thing away, can't you?'

'It isn't my looking-glass that's a cursed thing, Sam Atherley, it's what you sees in it, the face of a man created in the image o' God, and look what you've gone and made on it! I've a right to show you yourself i' the glass, for it's often give me back my own face as beastly as yours is to-night, but never, thank God, since I signed the pledge and turned teetotal. I tell you what, Atherley,' he continued, restoring the glass to its place on the wall as his wife entered the kitchen with the bowl of cold water, 'you don't leave this house to-night afore you've give me your solemn oath as you'll turn teetotal.'

'No, Mr. Christie, no,' said Atherley slowly, 'I may ha' fallen low, but not so low as that comes to neither!'

Christie made a sign to his wife to leave them alone, and then, standing opposite his guest with his legs wide apart and his hands on his hips, he continued:

'Sam Atherley, you're not agoing to quarrel with the means o' your salvation! Summat's got to be done to stop you going to the devil quicker than a' express train down a' incline, and nothing but teetotal 'll put the break on. Now, take and dip your old fuddled head in that bowl o' cold water; water outside and water inside is all as you require, and you'll be a respected member o' society yet;' and Sam did as he was bid like a child, and when he lifted his head and face dripping with water even asked meekly, 'Will that do?'

But the man, who had so strangely taken charge of him and assumed command over him, said authoritatively: 'No, it won't do. You dip it in again!' and again Sam Atherley did as he was told, and received for his reward a rough towel with which to dry his dripping locks, and a comb, with very few teeth, to disentangle them with and to lessen the striking resemblance he presented to a Skye terrier fresh from a bath. Christie laughed and slapped his leg with delight.

'Why, Atherley, you haven't looked like that often since your wedding day! You'll have your old woman falling in love with you over again! You ain't half a bad-looking chap when the drink's out of you, and when them cuts and bruises is healed, and that black eye right again. Now, first thing upo' Monday morning you come along o' me and sign the pledge, and then I shall take you to a prayer meeting at our chapel o' Wednesday night, and by Sunday you'll be fit to sit right end up in a pew and listen to our preacher twice!'

Atherley gave his now sober head a sullen toss. He felt like a bull caught in a net.

'I hate them chapellers! I'm not going among 'em, I tell you!'

'Not afore Wednesday night you certainly are not,' replied Christie imperturbably. 'I don't know as they'd have anything to do with you at present, but when you go t' Ebenezer along o' me as my teetotal friend, they'll give you a welcome and make a deal of you too. And now I'll lend you a decent hat o' my own

and take you home, and I'll be round your way by nine o'clock i' the morning and never leave you alone by yourself, not for five minutes, till you've signed the pledge o' Monday morning. Don't you attempt to argify with me' he said, as Sam began to remonstrate strongly at the prospect before him. 'I know what I'm adoing! When a chap has gone that fer in drink as you 'ave, and as I did, he can't stop hisself. He wants someone like to take and drive him to make a start in the right direction. A chap did it for me once and saved me, and I'm adoing it for you whether you like it or not! Swearing's nothing to me, you may just as well save your breath to keep your pledge next week; you'll want it all, I can tell you.'

Great was the amazement and fear of Mrs. Atherley and Reuben, when, as the clock struck ten, Tom Christie led the father into the kitchen as sober as they were themselves. Such a thing had seldom happened in the memory of the mother, and never in that of

the son. It was a portent, and betokened strange things to follow. All the next day Christie did as he promised, hung on tenaciously to Atherley, and for the first time in many years his place in Ebenezer Chapel knew him not for the whole of Sunday. He took possession of him bodily, talked to him for hours, sang hymns at him and to him, accompanying himself on the accordion, and when his victim began to look dangerously bored and as though about to break out into frenzy, he took him by the arm and hurried him off for a swift walk in the open air.

When bedtime came at the end of a Sunday so long, it oppressed Sam Atherley like an instalment of eternity, he said to his wife: 'I'll sign the pledge to-morrow morning if it's only to get shut o' Tom Christie!' And sign it he did, which was wonderful; but that, having done so, he should keep it was more wonderful still.

Why Atherley should regard his written promise as more binding than his spoken

word is difficult to explain, and yet it was so. The most solemn vows had been as powerless to restrain him as the withes that Samson broke with a touch, but no sooner had he signed the pledge in the presence of witnesses than he felt his pride and obstinacy up in arms to keep it. All Dormington should see that Sam Atherley could be sober now that at long last he had made up his mind on the subject.

He had been a drunkard because he had made no effort to be anything else. He had suffered himself to drift aimlessly, but now that he had planted his foot it would be hard to stir him. Hitherto he had only exerted his will in isolated acts of mulish and insensate obstinacy, that proved, however, to be specimens of a dogged power of determination, which was so much force lying dormant in the man.

Great skill was shown by the teetotal folk in connection with Ebenezer Chapel in the management of their unexpected convert. It was a double-barrelled triumph for the

brethren to snatch as it were a brand from two fires at once, saving a drunkard from his vice and a churchman from the error of his ways. Many of the flock were present at the Wednesday evening prayer meeting out of sheer curiosity, to see the black sheep that had been so unexpectedly driven into the fold. Christie was in charge of Atherley as his tamer and keeper, and led him safely through the ritual of the meeting, putting a hymn-book in his hand when they were about to sing, nudging him with his elbow when he should kneel down, pulling him by the sleeve to rise when prayer was over, and generally treating him as though he were imbecile. As the immediate plucker of the brand from the burning, Tom Christie was called upon by Mr. Tranter, the preacher, to open the meeting with prayer, which he at once proceeded to do in narrative form, beginning, 'Thou knowest, O Lord, that as I was coming home from my work on Saturday evening last, I saw Thy servant here present in a disgusting state of intoxication,

and Thou knowest, too, what a chance it was my coming that way at all, when I usually take the short cut by the riverside, but it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps,' and in this oblique way he was able to tell everyone present, as he longed to do, of his adventures with Sam Atherley on the previous Saturday night.

Sympathetic groans were heard issuing from the depths of pews, but mostly from the women, who appeared to relish the account of Christie's heroic dealings with the drunkard more than the men did. Then the preacher lifted up his voice and prayed, not so much that the grace of sobriety might be given to the reclaimed drunkard, as that he might be cleansed from the spiritual errors of the Church, and his eyes purged that he might see the truth as Mr. Tranter was able and willing to set it forth.

Next in turn after him rose a pale-faced shoemaker, with red rims to his eyes, who thanked the Lord that a male child, meaning

the grey-haired Samuel Atherley, had been born in their midst, and forthwith lost himself in metaphoric mazes, in which he sounded more like a delirious Mrs. Gamp than one whose business lay with boots and shoes.

Atherley had not a notion what it all meant, for as yet he was unacquainted with the phraseology in which the brethren at Ebenezer Chapel expressed themselves, but he was genuinely gratified to find himself the important man of the meeting. He had always held a very high opinion of himself, and it seemed as if folks, if it were only the once despised Ebenezer folks, were coming round to his way of thinking, or why should they make this pother about him? All the prayers were for him, and though some of their expressions about him were more free than he enjoyed or thought becoming, still these chapel people evidently thought a great deal of him, to keep on like that for a whole hour and a half. It was fatiguing and boring, but gratifying, and when he rose from his knees

that felt crushed and bruised from the unaccustomed attitude, it was with heightened self-complacency, and as his new friends said that he was now converted he supposed they knew best, and that it was all right.

When the fiend of drink was cast out of Sam Atherley, another and more subtle a demon immediately entered, and took up its abode in him. At Ebenezer Chapel, instead of offering the reclaimed drunkard a permanent seat on the penitents' bench, a commanding front pew was assigned to him, with the option of mounting the pulpit itself from time to time, and his old well-earned name of 'Soaking Sam' became in religion Mr. Atherley. His easy billy-cock was changed into an agonizing stove-pipe hat, and he was set up as an example instead of a warning to the flock at Ebenezer, and was called upon to give his experience at crowded meetings. Under the influence of his zealous new friends, Atherley had exchanged a blatant bodily vice for a hidden vice of the soul, intemperance for spiritual pride, which

so far clearly was an improvement, as he indulged in it at his own risk and injured nobody by it but himself.

It was no part of Atherley's new creed to admit that his own weakness and want of self-control had led him astray. It suited his vanity better to abuse all stimulants as demons stronger than man, while he secretly envied men of self-government who were temperate in drink as in other things. It was part of his reformation to deprive his white-faced, under-fed wife of the mug of beer with which she moistened the crusts that formed her slender supper. The poor soul would have given up her bread as well as her beer to propitiate her master if he had demanded it of her, and she mutely wondered how long it would all last.

As weeks passed by and grew into months, and still her husband kept sober, Mrs. Atherley thought it only right to mark her approval of his conduct by trying to make his home look as attractive to him as the public-house used

to do. She sanded the kitchen floor, drew forward the settle at right angles with the wide fire-place, hung up a few pewter pots on the wall, and set three brown earthenware spittoons at irregular intervals among the chairs, presenting, as far as the means at her disposal would allow, a modest imitation of the interior of the Barley Mow.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MAN AND THE HOUR

There is no man whom fortune does not visit once in his life.

It was late on a summer evening, and Richard was returning from a chemistry class at the Working Men's College, swinging along the Gray's Inn Road with energetic strides, when his attention was drawn to a tall, elderly gentleman with stooping figure, endeavouring to thread his way in the dubious light among the moving mass of vehicles. The place and the moment were alike ill-chosen for any but an active and clear-sighted man to attempt the crossing, at a point where a tributary side street poured its traffic into the main road, and just as a chain of omnibuses were following each other in quick succession. It was a case of whom the gods destroy they

first infatuate, for the old gentleman, after pausing some time on the curbstone, selected this particular juncture of affairs as most favourable for his venture, and plunged boldly into the wheeled torrent.

Once launched in the stream it was impossible to go back, and yet he lacked decision to press forward. The moving lights that flashed past him bewildered him, and hearing himself loudly shouted at, he hesitated, and started aside to avoid a heavy waggon that came thundering behind him. As he did so he was struck on the shoulder by the shaft of a hansom driving swiftly round the corner, and thrown down before it like a devotee of Juggernath, in the best possible attitude for the cab to run over him, breaking his left leg as it bumped and bounded over the obstruction offered to its progress.

Richard rushed to the rescue, and he and a policeman between them speedily had the injured man safe on the pavement, out of reach of hoofs and wheels. A crowd, eager

for excitement of any kind, and in hopes of seeing something dreadful, gathered round the prostrate form, and as quickly dispersed when it was found to be neither a case of drunkenness to arouse compassionate fellow-feeling, nor one of the worst kind of accidents the streets afford for the morbid delight of the spectator.

'Why couldn't the old gent 'ave waited and let me see 'im safe over?' said the policeman. 'His way o' crossing puts me more in mind of a female fool up from the country than anythin' else; but we must bring 'im to out o' this 'ere faint.'

In a neighbourhood thick set with public houses, brandy was soon procured, and Richard poured a quantity down the throat of the unconscious man, and presently he opened a pair of remarkably keen grey eyes, looked shrewdly about him, and took in the situation completely. He glanced up at the policeman supporting his shoulders, then at Richard, carefully ascertaining the exact posi-

tion of the fracture, and, in spite of the pain he suffered, said with a tone of triumph, 'I always thought I should be run over in the streets of London!' and he felt like the lady who, after vainly looking for a burglar under the bed for thirty years, found him at last.

Richard laughed outright, but the professional grimness of the policeman's face did not relax a muscle.

'It ain't nothin' to be proud of, sir; it don't take no dexterity to get run over at night in a crowded thoroughfare. I've took the cabby's number, if you like to follow up this 'ere.'

'No, no; leave it alone! The man was a fool to drive round a corner so quickly, and I was another to attempt to cross when I did,' said the old gentleman with admirable temper and calmness, though his face was drawn with pain. 'The question is, how am I to get to my house in Queen's Square, Bloomsbury, with a broken leg?'

'Oh, we'll manage that all right,' said

Richard. 'I'll make a temporary splint with my umbrella, and bind it with our handkerchiefs. The fracture is between the knee and the ankle. I can support it for you till we get you home, and you have it properly set,' and he bound the umbrella to the leg rigidly from the knee downwards, to prevent the ends of the fractured bone from jarring against each other.

'Are you a doctor?' he asked, as he felt Richard's light firm touch, and was grateful for the support afforded to the injured limb by the impromptu splint.

'No, sir, I'm not a doctor, but you need not be afraid; I'm quite competent to do all that's needful at the present, which is merely to keep the broken bone in position. And now we can get you into a cab without hurting you unduly, and I shall go home with you,' and the old gentleman was helped with pain and difficulty into a cab, and Richard, seating himself beside him, supported the weight of the broken leg across his knee.

The policeman accompanied them as in duty bound, for fear lest the active young man should combine the practice of pickpocket with that of amateur surgeon, and regard his patient's extremity as his own opportunity.

It was midnight when Richard parted from the stranger who had been so unexpectedly thrown on his mercy. He did not leave him till a surgeon had attended him and set the broken bone, and the patient was safe in bed; but before he left he heard words that filled him with delight. The surgeon expressed his approval of the temporary splint. 'You are fortunate, Mr. Gage, in falling into such good hands,' he said, and turning to Richard he asked him if he was a medical student.

'No, sir; I wish I was. I'm only an assistant in a chemist's shop.'

'Never despair! That's a position that has proved a stepping-stone to the profession before now; you evidently have the making of a surgeon in you.'

'A great surgeon was lost to the world in me!' was the apparently irrelevant remark uttered in a weak voice from the depths of the fourpost bed, and both the surgeon and Richard turned towards the patient.

The wearied voice continued: 'To-night is Friday, call on me on Monday evening, my young friend, and ask for Mr. Gage. What is your name?'

'Richard Dare, sir.'

'Then, Richard Dare, I shall have several things to talk to you about on Monday night, and one of them will be to explain my last remark. You have rendered me a great service, and I like your manner of doing it too, but just now I've neither head nor heart, I can't think, I can't feel grateful, I'm nothing but a vast broken leg,' and the exhausted voice sank into something very like a groan as Richard stepped quietly out of the room.

Among the thousands in the great city whose eyes knew no sleep that night, Mr. Gage and Richard kept vigil from causes the

most widely dissimilar. The owner of the broken leg could not sleep for sheer physical pain. He had never before been so unpleasantly reminded that he was not yet a disembodied spirit, while Richard, healthily unconscious of his body, lay staring in the darkness from pure agitation of mind. Again and again he went over every detail of his adventure with Mr. Gage, from the moment when he first saw him, courting death and disaster among the cabs and omnibuses in the Gray's Inn Road, till he parted from him, the temporary wreck of a man, in bed in his house in Queen Square. Who and what was the eccentric old gentleman who asked to see him again, and what could be the explanation he wished to offer of his strange remark? Visions of a timely friend and helper appearing on the scene filled Richard's mind with radiant pictures. Might not Mr. Gage's eccentricity take the amiable form of believing in him, and putting him in the way to attain his

heart's desire and ambition? At the mere thought he felt as if he and sleep had bidden good-bye to each other, and he passed the short summer night in tossing to and fro.

Saturday and Sunday Richard spent in a delightful flutter of indefinable hope, and at the earliest moment after the shop was closed on Monday evening, he hastened to keep his appointment with Mr. Gage. To-night, if he had seen half a dozen old gentlemen running into peril of life and limb, he would have left it to someone else to fly to the rescue; he was bent on the most important matter in the world, and nothing must stay or hinder him. At length, after jostling along the crowded streets without adventure, he entered the haven of the Square, where troops of ragged children from the back streets were romping about the pump in the open space, running races with shrieks of laughter, and dancing to the metallic notes of a piano organ, that was playing a popular waltz with mechanical precision and at break-neck speed.

The sunshine still lingered in an amber glow in the blackened tops of the trees in the Square garden, and shed a warm lustre on the upper storeys of the houses, as Richard knocked at the door and asked for Mr. Gage. He was admitted at once and shown into a large dining-room, darker and cooler than the open air, where a young girl was standing at the window, book in hand, endeavouring to read by the fading light. As he entered she turned towards him, and though it was too dark for him to see her face, a strange shyness, and even terror, came over him.

Richard did not fear the face of man. Men were his friends or foes as the case might be. It was a masculine world to him, except for the memory of his gentle, querulous mother, and the glorified ideal he still cherished of Margaret Featherstone, as something beyond and above all womankind. Girls to him were unknown, mysterious beings, and as his friends were mostly young men as lonely as himself, he had never visited in

families, and was ignorant of the ways and manners of society. Hitherto the only young ladies who had spoken to him had done so across the counter, a prosaic barrier scarcely to be overleapt by the wildest romance or most vaulting ambition.

And now for the first time Richard was face to face on equal terms with a young lady. She neither wanted violet powder nor lozenges, nor did she ask him for change for half a sovereign, which so far had represented the nature and extent of his intercourse with ladies. The young girl closed her book, and turning frankly toward him said, in pleasant unaffected tones:

'You are the gentleman who came to my uncle's rescue the other night when he was so badly hurt, are you not? I was from home when it happened, or I should have liked to thank you then for all your kindness. My uncle thinks he would have lost his life but for you,' and Richard was aware that a pair of luminous eyes were fixed on him in the gathering twilight.

He was bewildered by the sweet voice and gentle courtesy. For a moment he was uncertain how he ought to address a lady, but right feeling and simplicity of mind brought him safely through the difficulty. If Richard was not a gentleman by culture, he was one by nature; he respected himself and the person with whom he spoke, and replied without egoism or affectation.

'I am only to be thanked for doing what any other man would have done in my place. I am glad I happened to be passing at the time, for I think I was able to save Mr. Gage a great deal of pain,' and finding that he gathered courage in the gracious presence, he ventured to ask a question.

'Do you think Mr. Gage will be well enough to see me this evening as he proposed?'

'Oh, yes; the doctor says that you may see him, but it will be kind of you not to stay very long. In a few days he will be stronger,

and may talk as much as he likes, and it will do him no harm.'

Just then a servant entered the room and set a lamp on the table, and the light revealed to Richard that he was talking to a remarkably pretty young girl of about eighteen. She was tall and slender, dark haired and grey eyed, with a pleasant humorous expression of mouth, and a way of looking at one as though she were at leisure from herself to regard everyone and everything about her with interest and innocent curiosity. The quiet self-possession of the young lady set him at ease, and he ventured to say that he hoped Mr. Gage was going on well.

'The doctor is quite satisfied with his progress so far, and is glad to find that he has suffered less from the shock than he expected. But will you not sit down while I ask if my uncle is ready to see you?' and Miss Gage left the room. In a few minutes she returned and, bidding Richard follow her, led the way up the wide oak staircase to the room

he had been in on the night of his first memorable visit.

Mr. Gage was sitting up in bed, apparently very comfortable, with the broken leg stretched before him immovably cased in plaster of Paris. The room was fragrant with tobacco, and the counterpane littered over with papers and books, the invalid looking as thoroughly settled among his surroundings as though he had been confined to his bed for months instead of days. He greeted Richard cordially, and asked him to take a seat near the lamp, that he might see him as they talked together.

'And that must not be for long, my dear uncle,' said his niece as she placed the hand bell within his reach, 'or you will overtire yourself and the doctor will blame me!'

'Would you rather see me another time, sir, when you are stronger?' asked Richard, fearful of doing harm by his visit.

'By no means! I have not abdicated because I am confined to my bed. Stay and

talk with me, I am still master in my own house!' and Miss Gage smiled and left the room, that seemed to Richard to become perceptibly duller for her absence.

'I am very glad to see you,' said the old gentleman as soon as they were alone. 'The other evening I was unable to speak of the great obligation under which you have placed me. I believe that I owe my life to you!' and Mr. Gage looked at Richard with glowing eyes, and closed his thin lips as though he had done with speech.

After a pause he continued: 'You may have heard the old superstition that, if you save a man from drowning, you make him your enemy. Well, you have saved my life on dry land, and have made me your friend. You have rendered me the greatest service in the power of man, and I wish to show you that I appreciate your action. There have been times when I should have felt only moderately grateful to anyone who had saved my life—God knows I have not always set

great store by it, but that has nothing to do with the present, and I am deeply grateful to you,' and Mr. Gage extended a lean yellow hand towards Richard, which he pressed heartily, blushing with pleasure as he did so.

'I am glad indeed, sir, I happened to be on the spot when you were in such need of help. I only wish I had been by your side in time to prevent the accident, instead of arriving a moment too late.'

'That would indeed have been fortunate,' said Mr. Gage with a rueful glance at his immovable leg; 'but wishing is no good after the event, my friend. And now, Mr. Dare, I wish to talk to you about yourself, and to ask you some questions. You acted and spoke the other night as though you were fond of surgery.'

'And so I am; it is the desire of my life to become an operating surgeon.'

Mr. Gage looked at the enthusiastic young man and sighed.

'Ah! my dear young fellow, a fine

surgeon has been lost in me! When I was a young man I felt exactly as you do now. I had the strongest wish in the world to become a surgeon!'

'You had, sir? May one ask what prevented you from following the career you were drawn towards?'

'Certainly, I don't mind telling you; simply this, I was cursed with a competence!' and, seeing Richard did not take his meaning, 'cursed with a competence, neither more nor less. You do not know what that is, do you?'

'I confess I do not. Does it mean having more money than a man knows what to do with?'

'Not at all,' replied the old gentleman promptly. 'If a fortune is only big enough, it brings a thousand duties, interests, and cares with it, and finds a man work if he has never had any before. To be cursed with a competence is a very different thing. It is to have just enough money to cut the sinews of

exertion and clip the wings of ambition, in short, enough for a man to sit down and rust upon comfortably. That was my case. A wealthy old gentleman, thinking me, I suppose, a promising young fellow, in a moment of misdirected kindness left me five hundred a year, and promising I have remained ever since, for devil a thing have I performed, and that's the truth!'

'Still, sir, I am afraid I don't quite see how five hundred a year could prevent you from studying medicine,' objected Richard.

'You don't, don't you?' and Mr. Gage laughed pleasantly. 'Then I'll tell you how it was. This precious five hundred a year not only prevented me from being the surgeon I ought to have been, but it prevented me from being anything else of the slightest practical use. If a man is to make a figure in the world, to excel in any attainment or pursuit, he needs prodding on by the sharp goad of necessity, and I was only too comfortable as I was. I was sure of

a livelihood, and every profession required such strenuous work, while I found it so easy doing nothing, that I rusted on my five hundred a year. On a less sum I honestly think I should not have become such an aimless, drifting kind of chap. On two hundred a year, for instance, a man can't exactly rust comfortably. He may, so to say, corrode on it in a sordid kind of way, with his nose half an inch from the grindstone all his days, but that's hardly what one means by living. And so life has gone on, and I have inherited enough money to keep half a dozen old cumberers of the ground in a great deal more comfort than I am inclined to think they deserve, but all the while my debt to society remains unpaid. I have neither become the fine surgeon I intended to be, nor have I helped any other man to become one in my place. Now, I am wishful to repair the evil of my laziness,' and he paused and looked keenly at Richard.

The young man was hanging on every

word that he uttered, and his excited feeling was evidenced by his rapidly changing colour. Mr. Gage continued: 'You know that, in countries where there is compulsory military service, there are circumstances under which a man may buy himself off and find someone else to take his place in the army. If I had followed my vocation I should have served my time in the army of healers—it is too late to regret that—but now I think I see a chance of finding a substitute, and of, so to speak, paying a man to take my place in the ranks. If I provide a young man of talent with the means of having the best medical training to develop into the fine surgeon and valuable member of society I ought to have been, then I shall have made what reparation is possible, and shall feel that I am vicariously serving my fellow creatures. Do you take my meaning?'

Richard's mouth was dry with agitation, he could scarcely speak, but he nodded rapidly and said, 'Yes, yes!'

'Then, Richard Dare, will you be the man to represent to the world what I should have been if I had not fallen an easy prey in early life to the debilitating influence of a competence?'

'With every power of mind and body, sir, I'll be that man if you will only give me the chance!' said Richard fervently.

The old gentleman again looked at him, with glowing eyes and thin, compressed lips, and then spoke words of warning.

'Mind you, you will have to work as few men of this generation know how to work, if you are to represent what I should have been in the medical profession! And I shall take good care not to give you anything like five hundred a year, lest you should be taken with the dry rot as I was!'

'Sir, that you should wish to do anything for me at all is generous——'

'Stop there!' said Mr. Gage with an imperative movement of the hand. 'Let us thoroughly understand each other. The

word generosity can have no meaning between you and me. I simply want to fit a young man, who happens not to have the means of his own, to fill the useful place in life I ought to have filled, and in helping me to do this you confer a kindness on me by lowering the voice of conscience from a roar to a whisper. If you will work like a galley slave, I will undertake to give you a modest income, enough to keep you and to pay your fees, till you can live by your profession.'

When Richard heard this, he thought for the first time in his life he was about to faint. His heart beat thick, he heard a rushing sound, Mr. Gage's glowing eyes seemed to recede indefinitely, and the place where his face should have been became a blank. With a mighty effort he rose from his seat, stood by the bedside, and found his voice at last.

'Sir, you shall never regret having chosen me to be the man to fulfil the aspirations of your youth. I know you do not

wish me to thank you; I quite understand the relationship in which we are to stand, and it suits me as well as it suits you. My work will prove better than words how deeply I feel the trust you have in me, a stranger, an unproved man. Is there any particular branch of surgery or medicine you wish me to devote myself to, and I will give my whole energies to it.'

Mr. Gage had kept his eyes fixed on the eager young man while he was speaking, and the result of the inspection was entirely favourable. He said to himself in a low voice, 'I believe I've found what I've wanted for many a year!' adding, in a clear and decisive tone, 'Yes, there is a subject to which I hope you will apply all your powers, and that is the discovery of the cause and the cure of cancer. If you can find out how this curse to humanity can be fought with and overcome, not merely treated in a palliative way, but eradicated, you will rank high among the benefactors of mankind.'

The young man was filled with enthusiasm as he listened. The idea of a life-long quest into the origin and nature of a dreadful and obscure disease, was as exciting and stimulating to him as the search for the source of the Nile has been to the African traveller. Where another man might turn away with loathing, Richard was irresistibly attracted to a subject offering scope for the fullest development of his mental faculties. While he was endeavouring to express coherently the overpowering feeling Mr. Gage's words roused in him, the door opened softly and a cheerful voice said, 'Uncle John, you are talking too much and too long! You will be ill in the morning and the doctor will be displeased,' and Johanna Gage entered the room, and Richard thought she looked at him as though she expected him to leave. He rose, but the invalid signalled him to sit down again. Richard glanced from the one to the other. 'Which am I to obey?' he asked smiling.

'In the sick room you obey the nurse; out of it the patient,' said Johanna promptly, 'which means that it is not good for my uncle to talk much at present, but when he is downstairs again it will help him to get better to see his friends as often as they can come to see him.'

'I believe the girl is right,' Mr. Gage admitted reluctantly. 'Come again next Monday night, and we will arrange for your first step from the chemist's shop to the hospital ward; when that is once taken, you will be on your feet in your predestined path. There, goodnight; I have talked inordinately! You are a good listener, Mr. Dare; when we know each other better, my niece will tell you that is all I require in conversing with my friends,' and he waved his hand and settled to his newspaper again.

Richard left Queen Square that night in a tumult of happy excitement, worth long anxiety and uncertainty to experience only for one brief hour. The desire of his heart was brought

within reach, dreams were to become realities; aspirations, large and indefinite, to embody themselves in accomplished fact. Happy Richard! Happier even than he knew, for never can the real be great or beautiful as the ideal, and actual attainment ever falls short of the mark set before one. But in that hour, filled with gratitude, wonder, hope, and high ambition, there was motive power to carry him on with unabated energy through many laborious years.

And the bright, lovely girl, who had raised his self-respect by frankly treating him as an equal, had opened up for him a world of refinement and unimagined possibilities. Richard looked at the hand she had so lately touched, that had never before been so honoured, and he still felt the pressure of her soft fingers. He was not unfaithful to his presiding deity, but Margaret Featherstone dwelt in a sphere apart, remote and inaccessible, while Johanna Gage was in the same world with himself, and brightened and refined it by her

presence. In some distant future he might attain to Margaret, for after the wonders of this epoch-making day he dare call nothing impossible; but for the present, if he might be blessed with the friendship of this delightful, spirit-stirring being, as well as with that of her generous eccentric uncle, he should ask no greater gift from fortune.

CHAPTER IX

BORNE ON THE WIND

Thus, wishing unto them (surgeons) the three requisites of their practice, an eagle's eye, a lady's hand, and a lion's heart, I leave them, and proceed.—FULLER.

THE course of Richard's life was now effectually turned into its predestined channel, and in the October term he began his medical studentship at the Eastminster Hospital. On the first day of each month he received a cheque from Mr. Gage for the precise amount he considered sufficient for the maintenance of a frugal young man. To prevent his protégé from being cursed with a competence, which had been his own bane, the amount was so nicely calculated with regard to expenditure, that when Richard had duly settled his small weekly bills, he was happy if he had a shilling left over and above to play with.

For Mr. Gage intended his provision to be like the manna that rained down from heaven upon the Israelites of old—in quantity sufficient for daily bread, but that might not be hoarded up for to-morrow's use without disastrous consequences ensuing. Once a month he required him to bring his receipts for inspection, and he went through every detail with a fine vicarious sense of economy, in maintaining a hard-working young student on a less sum than would have enabled him to keep his own body and soul together on amicable terms.

As time passed rapidly by, till Richard had been dependent on Mr. Gage's bounty for a year, the old gentleman became aware in looking over his receipts of a gradual decrease in his small daily expenses that at first pleased him, then puzzled him, and, as it continued, at length fairly alarmed him.

'This is going too far, Johanna,' said Mr. Gage to his niece as he laid a handful of bills on the table before him. 'Young Dare is pushing a virtue to the extreme when it be-

comes a vice. He's saving on his actual bread and cheese till, if he doesn't take care, his will be the dismal fate of the horse that was brought down to a bean a day. Now, as I mean him to live and do good work, I must put a stop to this.'

'Possibly Mr. Dare is in want of a little pocket money, and as he earns nothing yet, he is obliged to save it, or go without; for I don't think you allow him a margin beyond his actual living,' replied his undaunted niece without looking up from her book.

'I know I don't; but what should a hard-working student want with spending money, hey?'

'Even a hard-working student may sometimes wish to enjoy the pleasure of helping another who is worse off than himself, or he may like a little recreation after a day of repulsive duties. He may like to go to the theatre sometimes, or—— Oh, there may be a number of things he might wish to do in his small leisure, that all cost something. I would

increase his allowance, if I were you, sir!' and Johanna spoke with bright decision, and looked up smiling. 'He works very hard, and you know what is the result of all work and no play; you don't want to make Richard a dull boy!'

'I want to make a man of him, that's why I've allowanced him so closely, to prove what stuff he's made of. I wish anyone had done as much for me when I was his age! I am bound to say he has worked well so far, almost as well as I believe I should have done in his place, and I've no objections to increase his allowance, now that I see he is to be trusted. But he must explain what this frenzy of economy means! I can't have the lad starve himself; if he means to commit suicide let him do it in a prompt, business-like way, not in this slow and tortuous method!'

The afternoon when Johanna's sympathy had befriended Richard financially, he was taking brief holiday in Kew Gardens. It was Sunday, and after a more than usually

hard week's work in the surgical wards, the flat, used-up atmosphere of the hospital hung about him, and he felt that he must find his way somewhere into the pure open air and sunshine. He could not afford to take train into the country, but the ride on the omnibus to Kew would fill his lungs with fresh air, and an hour spent in the Gardens give him the refreshment he needed.

Richard's depression that day was mere bodily languor, the result of hard work on insufficient diet, and of constantly breathing exhausted air. His spirits were habitually even; the sight of suffering did not weigh on him, because his life was spent in efforts to alleviate and remove the causes of pain. The casual visitor to a hospital is more affected by what he sees there than the doctor and nurse, who divide between them the struggle with disease and death, whose service to the sick and wounded is pity translated into action; for the spectator of physical pain, unless he can turn the emotion of compassion into help-

ful service, enervates himself by fruitless depression of spirits ; a barren pity that does neither himself nor the object of it any good.

Richard, who had seen no trees, except in the London parks and gardens, for four years, looked about him at Kew with inexpressible pleasure. He seated himself on a bench in a retired part of the Gardens in the mellow sunshine to enjoy the wonderful beauty of the autumn foliage. The blood-red maples, brown oaks, and yellow elms stood in a brief pomp of colour, waiting for the rough winds to strip them of their glory and leave them in winter nakedness. As yet scarcely a leaf had fallen on the green, shaven lawns, and the autumn flowers were in full bloom. It was a delightful sight for a Londoner to refresh his eyes with, and by this time Richard had become one to all intents and purposes. He had lost his country speech, without however acquiring a cockney accent in its place, and his country complexion had faded, till he was almost as sallow as a Londoner born and

bred. His was distinctly a noticeable face, with brown eyes that looked into the heart of you, and force and resolution in mouth and chin. He was tall and strongly knit, and his hand the typical surgeon's, large, broad-palmed and supple, with long sensitive fingers and powerful thumb.

The Gardens were crowded with decent holiday makers that the fine afternoon had brought out of their dingy streets. Shop-girls and youths sauntered about enjoying each other's company and the display of their best things, and respectable families trooped along in irregular procession, the father carrying the last baby but one, and the weary mother with the latest arrival in her arms, followed by the elder children tricked out like dancing dogs in their Sunday finery. Richard sat watching the stream of humanity that drifted by with kindly feelings, and it was not long before he had to share his bench with a large, mild, elderly woman, in charge of a small irrepressible boy,

who detached herself from the moving crowd and took a seat by him. He looked with amusement on her struggles with the wilful child, whom she was powerless either to amuse or control, and it vividly recalled his mother's inability to cope with little Reuben in his lively moods. And the restless imp put him in mind of his brother, and for his sake he stretched out a hand to save him as he was pitching over the back of the bench, on which he had elected to stand upright.

'Oh, thank you, sir!' said the elderly woman whom Richard took to be the mother of the imp. 'But 'e don't seem to take no 'arm from tumbling! 'E's an awful child, though I says it as p'r'aps oughtn't, but knows 'im best. 'E's my little grandson, 'e is. My only daughter died when 'e was born, and a poor exchange it's been for me to lose 'er and keep 'im, to 'ave a dead corpse carried out of the 'ouse and a live monkey brought in!'

'The lad's too active for you,' said Richard smiling, 'that's all that's the matter with

him,' and he gave the urchin a ride on his foot, while the grandmother produced a newspaper packet of refreshments from the depths of her pocket. At the sight of something to eat, Tommy wriggled himself free and made a snatch at the cake incautiously exposed to view.

'Oh, you rude boy!' said the grandmother feebly, holding on to the paper instead of the cake, which he seized in both hands, and bore off with exulting shrieks of laughter. The woman looked at her little grandson with just the same pucker of the brow Richard remembered so well in his mother, and then rose to pursue him, the torn newspaper slipping from her lap as she stood up, and he soon lost sight of the wilful child and granny in futile chase after him.

The little comedy took Richard vividly back to the old days at home. Reuben would be a boy of eight by now, and have forgotten brother Richard, and the baby no longer a baby but a little girl, a pretty little girl he hoped, of five years old. It was evident to Richard as he counted not only the number

but the size of the mouths at home, that unless his father was steadier than he used to be, his mother must need more money for her slender housekeeping than she did when he made one of the family, and he had pinched and saved out of Mr. Gage's allowance that he might send her a present every month. 'Shall I write to her with this month's remittance?' he asked himself, as his heart grew tender at the recollection of his mother. But he decided merely to write, 'With Richard's love,' in spite of the temptation to enclose a letter with the post office order. She must know from the increased sum he sent her, small as it was, that he was doing well, and he still did not wish his father to know anything about him till he was in an assured position of independence.

Thus thinking of his boyhood, and of the fateful day when Margaret Featherstone's appearance in the forge gave him courage to fly from the life he detested, Richard sat leaning forward, idly tracing patterns on the gravel

path with his cane. A light puff of wind blew the torn piece of newspaper the old woman had dropped fluttering towards him like a live thing, and in mere wantonness he set his foot upon it, and brought its career to a standstill. As he did so he caught sight of its name printed in large letters, 'Dormington Herald,' and instantly his idle curiosity was turned to keenest interest, and he picked up the ragged paper as promptly as though it had been a letter directed in his mother's writing.

Richard had not heard the name of his native place for four years nor seen it in print, and the simple word 'Dormington' roused a desire for any kind of local news, and he turned the paper over carefully, smiling to himself as he recognised once familiar names. The date was torn off, but he saw from the stock sales that it was a recent number of the 'Herald,' which was a weekly paper. Then he turned the fragment over to the Births, Marriages, and Deaths, in search of names that he might light on under one or other of the three

headings, in spite of an irritating tear across the marriages that ran zigzagging down among the deaths.

Taking the births first, as the beginning of all things, Richard at once saw a name that he used to know very well. The wife of his father's next-door neighbour, the baker, announced the arrival of twins in a household that four years ago was already full to overflowing. As a medical student in a vast, overpopulated city, he had seen enough of births to make him wish they would stop for a few years, while the deaths went on as usual, so he read no further in that class of news, but ran his eyes down the column in quest of something of a more interesting nature. He did not know a single name among the mutilated list of marriages, except that of the old vicar, who appeared, single-handed, to have married most of the couples.

With a light heart he next glanced at the deaths, and there, too, he thought he should not recognise any names. But suddenly his

eyes grew fixed and his features rigid, as he read in letters that seemed to glow like fire, 'On the tenth inst., Elizabeth,' then came a blank where a piece of the paper was gone, 'of Samuel Atherley, blacksmith, of this town, aged,' and nothing more. The line ended at the torn edge of the 'Herald.'

The wretched printed rag, even in this mutilated form, had delivered its message, and pierced Richard to the heart with what pangs of sorrow and remorse God only knew. His head sank forward on his breast, that rose in a hard dry sob. The sorrowful, disappointed life of his mother passed before him in the anguish of swift retrospect, and he saw, in even exaggerated proportion, how much he must have contributed to her troubles. And now it was too late to explain to her why he had remained hidden from her so long, why he had maintained his stubborn silence. The joy of revealing himself to her as a son of whom she might be proud would never now be his, and he felt as though there was nothing

left worth living for. He had not realised that what his mother longed for was love and not pride. If he had returned to her in rags, unsuccessful and beaten in the struggle of life, her arms would have been open to receive him as tenderly, nay, even more tenderly, than if he had returned to her with fame and reputation. And he had withheld from her for four years the joy of knowing where he was and what he was doing, though she alone, of all creatures in the world, was as interested in him as he was in himself, which, bearing in mind the egoism of youth, means that she had not a thought but for her son. Too late, too late to rectify this! When shall we cease to treat time as though it were eternity, and to act as if our loved ones, who walk by our side but for a few years, would always be with us, and at any moment we might tell them how dear they were, or ask their forgiveness for our self-absorption and neglect?

Richard never knew till now that he believed he had lost his mother, how much he

had loved the gentle, simple soul who had been the light of his childhood, whose unsought love he had taken as a matter of course. He tore in pieces the fragment of paper that had brought him such piercingly sad tidings, and scattered them to the wind, watching them with loathing as they drifted along the path. He rose and hurried from the spot where, a few minutes before, he had been so placidly happy, and the Gardens in their autumn pomp of colour seemed to him the most melancholy thing his eyes had ever beheld.

Late that evening Richard called in Queen Square, for Mr. Gage was not happy if he did not see him at least once a week, to tell him what work he was doing at the hospital and to report progress generally. Johanna's keen eyes saw as Richard entered the room that there was something wrong with him. His face was sad and stern, with an expression betokening feeling very different from anxiety or preoccupation of mind. She thought to herself, 'He has seen or heard some-

thing to-day that has given him great pain,' and who shall call it idle curiosity if she longed to know what it was? For Richard and Johanna had met at least once a week for a year past, and a friendship had sprung up between them that gave twinges of anxiety to her friends, though her uncle saw nothing in it to fear, having settled it comfortably in his own mind that Richard was too busy and Johanna too sensible to fall in love. But Mr. Gage was one of those travellers through life who need a finger-post to direct them on the plainest high road, and when Richard seated himself near him, he looked him full in the face without noticing any change in his appearance.

'You are rather later than usual, Richard; what have you been doing with yourself?' he asked.

'Am I late? I was not aware of it. I've walked from Kew and went on to my rooms before coming here, and it has taken me longer than I expected,' he said, looking at

his watch, and his voice was dull and unlike itself.

'You are very tired!' said Johanna.

'I? I am never tired!'

'Why should you be?' said Mr. Gage, putting on his glasses to examine the small file of bills beside him. 'At your age, if I had worked twelve hours out of the twenty-four, I shouldn't have been tired. You're something worse than tired, my boy—you've been playing at starving yourself lately.'

'Nonsense, sir; what should make you think that?' and Richard's colour mounted.

'These bills show it, my dear fellow,' said Mr. Gage, fluttering them to and fro in his hand, and at the mention of money matters Johanna quietly rose and left the room. 'These bills show it! You think I do not go into detail? I do though, and I can't have you living on buns and cocoa, to the exclusion of beef and beer. You've spent fifteen shillings less this month than last, saved out of your actual food. I don't like it, Richard;

we must put a stop to it. Do you understand?'

'But is not the money you are so good as to give me my own, sir?'

'It is, and it is not. By which I mean that it is yours to spend properly, but not to save. It won't admit of saving; in fact, I calculated it was just enough for your wants, and nothing more.'

'Nevertheless, I did want a little money beyond what I spend on my daily living, and till I can earn some, I can only have a shilling by going without the food or clothing that shilling helps to pay for. There is no hardship in that, sir. But I sha'n't want to save anything again, and my allowance is ample for myself.'

Mr. Gage had half a mind to ask Richard what had caused his fit of economy, and why the necessity for it was now at an end, but something in his dejected tone, and the remembrance of his conversation with Johanna checked him.

'I've been thinking, Richard, of increasing your allowance. You have shown yourself so capable of managing your own affairs with frugality, that I am willing to give you a margin that will admit of a few small extravagancies. I shall give you twenty pounds a year more than your present income,' and Mr. Gage smiled on the young man, and expected him to show delight at his proposal.

But he was undemonstratively silent, and when he spoke, it was not what he had anticipated to hear.

'Thank you, but if it is the same to you, sir, I would rather not have it. A month ago I should have accepted the money with all my heart, but I've no use for it now, and —in fact I don't want it at all. Let my income be what it is till I can add to it by my own exertions, as I shall do before very long, trust me.'

Mr. Gage listened with a puzzled smile.

'You're an extraordinary young fellow!'

and he was not sure whether he liked his offer being refused or not. 'You would have taken the money a month ago, and to-day you will not touch it! Well, you're the only young man I ever knew refuse an offer of money. Why, I've a couple of nephews, and they'd squeeze me dry between them if they could. Though they are as unlike in their circumstances—one is sweltering in Java, the other is freezing in Canada—as they are in disposition, they have one trait in common, that of never hesitating to write to Uncle John when they require money, and that is frequently.'

'Then the more reason, sir, that I should not want your money as well,' said Richard smiling for the first time, though his heart was heavy as lead.

'Well, well, have your own way! But do you find your allowance sufficient, honour bright?' said the old gentleman with kindly anxiety. 'If you did you would not have needed to pinch yourself to save out of it as

you have been doing, for longer than I like to think of.'

'I shall not do it again, sir, I promise you. What do I want with money? I care for nothing but my work now,' which unwholesome sentiment uttered by youthful lips was heard by Johanna as she returned to the room, and struck her with a chill.

After Richard's departure Mr. Gage gave Johanna an annotated report of their interview. He had much to say about Richard's late extraordinary economies, and his incomprehensible refusal to accept an addition to his allowance, and many guesses to hazard as to the cause of his self-denial, which he had expressly said no longer existed.

'Now, if Richard were a dissipated young man——' he continued.

'He is not that, Uncle John, whatever else he may be,' said his niece quickly.

'You interrupt me, my dear! I was going to say, if Richard were a dissipated young man, I should not have offered to increase his

very moderate allowance. As it is, I cannot help thinking he has had some good reason for starving himself, though I've no idea what the deuce it is. Whatever it may have been, I am glad the necessity is over, and, to return to my first astonishment, I never before knew a young man refuse money!'

'I admire him for it! Richard's a fine fellow!' said Johanna with enthusiasm, for she was in the habit of discovering real or imaginary good qualities in Richard Dare that set him apart in her mind from all the other young men of her acquaintance.

CHAPTER X

FRESH TROUBLE FOR MRS. ATHERLEY

When sorrows come, they come not single spies,
But in battalions.—*Hamlet.*

While Richard mourned his mother as dead, she, poor woman, was mourning for him as still among the living, though more truly lost to her than if he were dead and she knew the place of his burial. From the time when Richard first earned wages he had never failed to send his mother a small sum of money every month, and occasionally he enclosed a line with the remittance to assure her that he was well and doing well. But he had still such a vivid dread of his father following him, that he gave her no address to which she might reply, and the postmark 'London' no more indicated his whereabouts than if it had been 'space.'

Mrs. Atherley looked for a word from her son far more than for the present that accompanied it, though it was a tearful and mingled pleasure to the poor mother who could not reply, to tell him what a good lad Reuben was growing, and that the baby sister was a big girl now, learning to knit and to sew. While it was sweet to think that her boy remembered her, it hurt her when she considered that they might all be dead and buried at home, and Richard know nothing about it. He acted as though his family alone of all families on the earth was exempt from the universal law of change, as if he were sure of finding them alive and well, at any time when it might please him to reveal himself to them.

Mrs. Atherley's fresh trouble in her little daughter's death for the time being threw the old standing grief into the background. But as month after month passed by, and brought no token from Richard, she began to fear lest he had fallen into poverty, and that it was no

longer possible for him to send her even the small sum she had looked forward to with so much certainty. She would not allow herself to think that he was dead, though Mrs. Windybank frankly assured her that in her opinion that was the cause of his silence.

Mrs. Atherley had all along clung to the idea that she should see her dear boy again, and the more frightened and doubtful she felt, the more positively she said, 'Richard isn't dead! no, he can't be dead! he's in trouble, that's what it is. It's a deal more likely that than being dead, for you may have a 'underd misfortunes, but you can only die once!'

Little Elizabeth Atherley, whose death Richard had seen in the 'Dormington Herald' and so fatally mistaken for his mother's, had now been dead more than six months, and Mrs. Windybank was spending an afternoon with her friend, endeavouring to persuade her that it was high time she had done with her mourning, put a flower in her bonnet,

and went to chapel in her red and yellow plaid shawl.

'There's reason in all things, Mrs. Atherley,' she said with decision, 'but it's too much of a good thing to see you going about still for a bit of a child like that, wi' a face like a hearse, and fit to drive your 'usband to the public 'ouse, just to get shut of you for an hour. You should be thankful as you've got Reuben left; he might ha' been took along wi' the little gel, and then 'ow would you ha' liked it?'

'Aye, I'm glad the b'y's left! But I thought a deal o' my little Lizzie, I did. I always wanted to 'ave a gel. Most folks finds it easier 'aving gels than b'ys seemingly, but I'd five lads in a row afore ever I 'ad a gel, and now the Lord's took a fancy to 'er, and we've lost 'er. I looked to my little Lizzie to ha' rared 'er for a comfort in my old age, and nurse me in my last illness. But it wasn't to be, and now if I was to lay a-dying, there'd be nothing but men folk trampling round the bed

treading on each others' toes, knocking things over, and not knowing 'ow to make a poultice nor turn a pillow!' and she puckered her brow in anticipation of her dying discomfort.

'Why, Mrs. Atherley, you might be took that sudden you wouldn't need a deathbed nor nothing. You mightn't 'ave time to say good-bye to 'usband nor son! You might drop down same as if you was shot, as the saying is!' and Mrs. Windybank meant everything that is consoling and reassuring, for faithful are the wounds of a friend.

'It'll 'ave to be as the Lord pleases, no doubt,' said Mrs. Atherley drily, 'but it never 'as been a 'abit in our fam'ly to go dropping about dead and scaring folks. We've always died in our beds respectable, and in none of your iron bedsteads neither, but mi'ogony four-posters that my grandmother used to say was a credit to die in,' and as she paused to thread her needle a shadow from the window fell across her work. She looked up and saw two women clad in sombre costumes, each carrying

a large basket on her arm, and in a moment they had stopped and knocked at the door.

Mrs. Windybank continued her knitting with noisy clicking needles, while Mrs. Atherley put down her sewing, exclaiming as she rose, 'If it isn't them little Sisters of the Poor, as they call theirselves, come again for broken vittles! Why, only last week I gave 'em the 'eel of a loaf and a couple o' turnips. I'll see if I can't find 'em something more tasty like to-day,' and she hastened to the larder intent on charity.

She returned promptly with a greasy parcel done up in paper, and opened the door to the pale-faced quiet-spoken ladies, one of whom was young and the other only middle-aged, though their depressing costume suggested that they were both well stricken in years. Mrs. Atherley thrust her contribution with evident self-approval into the open basket of the elder sister, and was courteously thanked by her, when she closed the door to join Mrs. Windybank at the window in watch-

ing the sisters make their way into the High Street.

'Why, they're Papists, aren't they?' asked Mrs. Windybank with her nose still pressed to the pane, and her eyes turned sideways to obtain a better view of the black retreating figures.

'Aye, they're Papists, but they're a good sort, and I never can say no to any one that asks me for a bit o' bread, whether it's for theirselves or some one else, because o' my poor boy! Who knows but he may 'ave 'ad to beg 'is bread afore now,' and she wiped away a tear at the thought. 'I can't deny as they're Papists, but they come round and beg broken vittles as a Protestant beggar wouldn't say "thank you" for, and they take 'em and stew 'em all up together, and give 'em to the poorest folks.'

'That's a queer trade for ladies to turn their 'ands to,' said Mrs. Windybank, still maintaining her strained position at the window, 'and they ain't perticuler about their

dress seemingly, or they'd never make such black Guy Fawkeses o' theirselves,' and having almost wrung her neck in a final effort to watch the ladies round the corner, she resumed her knitting, saying as she did so, 'I dessay they're good women. Any'ow they're better going about like that out o' doors, than living with the Pope o' Rome learning 'is ways!'

'That's why I've just given 'em a bone of 'am, as my master's seen upon the table three times a day regular since Sunday fortnight, and says 'e's fair stalled wi' the sight of, and I hope some one'll 'elp my poor Richard if he needs it, same as I've 'elped them, and God bless 'em for it if they do is my prayer!'

CHAPTER XI

THE TEACHER TAUGHT

The heart needs not for its heaven much space, nor many stars therein, if only the star of love has arisen.—JEAN PAUL.

RICHARD'S student days were among the most delightful of his life. He was launched on a perfectly congenial career, with powers equal to every task to which he applied himself and stimulated by marked success in his work both of brain and of hand. He pursued his medical studies with an enthusiasm and devotion that satisfied even Mr. Gage, especially as the brilliant way in which he passed his examinations was a token of his powers that all could appreciate, and more than justified him in his choice of a *protégé*. Richard was spurred on to further exertion by the encouragement he met with from the medical staff at the hospital. His clinical notes were

highly praised, and held up to his fellow-students as models of what such notes should be, till all except the more generous among them were in danger of hating young Dare for outstripping them in the race. In the minor operations with which he was entrusted, he showed such an intuitive delicacy and precision of touch, that the greatest surgeon of the day prophesied that the obscure young student would yet prove himself in the true succession of brilliant operators, and a conspicuous member of the band of human benefactors.

Outside and beyond his professional studies Richard was bent on acquiring all the knowledge possible to a man of little leisure. He had taught himself to read French for the sake of valuable surgical works in that language, but he had no idea of its pronunciation. A page of French was to him only a series of signs which he translated into English as he passed his eye over it, and though he could do this correctly and quickly,

a dumb knowledge of French left much to be desired, and he consulted Johanna Gage in his difficulty. Richard and Johanna were by this time on terms of established friendship, having long called each other by their Christian names, and cheerfully playing at that dangerous game, for those who are not connected by any ties of relationship, of brother and sister. Johanna had asked Richard to let her consider him as a brother, and he had rapturously consented, provided that she would be a kind of adopted sister to him, for he dared not ask her to be anything more near or dear. It was an absurd and impossible relationship they sought to establish, and yet it served its turn in the delicious folly of youth. Johanna believed that a close and affectionate intimacy could exist between two young creatures of opposite sexes, without anything so weak on either side as falling in love. For she was scornful in her youthful inexperience and maiden pride, and asserted fearlessly that it was

merely because young people would not think of each other as brothers and sisters, that they spoilt everything by turning foolish.

But what sort of a brother was Richard allowed to be, when it would have been as much as his life was worth had he pressed a fraternal kiss upon his volunteer sister's brow? He soon discovered that the privileges of the new relationship were few and its duties many. He had to wait hand and foot on Johanna, which was excellently good for his manners, and she exacted polite attentions from him, and where he was ignorant on any occasion, which was frequently the case, he was forthwith taught how to behave better another time. And all was done with a tact and drollery that never wounded his *amour propre*. He had unconsciously put himself to school, and the best preceptress he could have chosen was instructing him in the unwritten social code with which he had had no chance of becoming familiar, though ignorance of it would have fatally barred his way.

Johanna as a young girl had lived abroad with her uncle, and had met many people and seen many things, yet at two-and-twenty years of age she was engagingly unsophisticated and simple-minded. When she asked Richard to come to her once a week in the evening after the day's work, for a lesson in French pronunciation, she had no idea that she was playing with edged tools, and, what is still more remarkable, neither had her uncle. Her very straightforwardness often manifested itself in conduct that in a less simple nature would have been the height of coquetry, so often do art and nature resemble each other. From force of circumstances, Johanna was her own chaperon, and though not of an acknowledged type, a perfectly efficient one. She made her own arrangements, and when they were completed, politely announced them to her uncle.

'Uncle John, I am going to give Richard some lessons in French,' she said airily; 'you have no idea how ghastly his pronunciation

is! He is to come to me at nine o'clock this evening, and we shall be in the drawing-room not to disturb you,' and the girl lightly kissed her uncle's forehead as she told him of her plans.

'Very well, my dear, keep your pupil in good order, that is all I ask.'

'Oh, that will be quite easy! Richard always does what I tell him; he is a gentleman, although he has had no advantages. When I have made his French pronunciation a shade less barbarous, I mean to ground him in German, and he will follow it up for himself afterwards.'

'And what will he teach you in return, little woman?' asked Mr. Gage, amused at the idea of his niece becoming Richard's instructress.

Punctually at nine o'clock the big grown-up pupil appeared, and was shown upstairs by Miss Gage's direction, and shortly afterwards the governess entered the room, looking quaintly demure and bent on strict attention to

duty. Her manner at first was so shockingly professional, Richard felt he should hate her directly; but presently Uncle John heard peals of laughter from the studious youth and maiden in the night school overhead.

'It was Richard wrestling with the word "embonpoint" that made us laugh so,' Johanna explained afterwards; 'you never heard anything so funny in your life as his attempts,' and she laughed again as she recalled his uncouth efforts.

When the teacher and the taught grew too hilarious for work, Johanna suddenly became alluringly studious and grave, and shook her head, and looking her pupil in the eyes said: 'Brother Richard, you are becoming flighty; if you will not attend to your lessons I shall go away!' Then ensued a very pretty scene of contrition on the pupil's part, with promises of amendment, and a gracious pardon from the teacher, who had in the first place begun the laughter herself.

Richard loved to bend over the same book

with Johanna, her breath fanning his cheek, her hand touching his as they turned over the page together, and if this was private tuition he preferred it very much to a public school education.

Whether the evening was fair or cloudy, the French lesson apparently wound up with a lesson in astronomy. For before saying good-night, mistress and pupil stood together in the recess of the window, talking in low tones, gazing at the moon above the blackened tree tops in the Square garden, or when she was not visible, contenting themselves with the stars in the strip of sky overhead.

For many weeks the night school was held regularly, and Johanna fulfilled her purpose and set to work vigorously to teach her pupil German, and his British tongue, that could not accommodate itself to the light touch and go of French pronunciation, found no difficulties to impede its utterance in the strong masculine Teutonic.

'What can I teach you in return for all

you have taught me?' asked the grateful pupil at the close of a lesson, with considerably more warmth than the circumstances warranted.

'I want nothing from you in return. It is reward enough for me to see your progress,' said the teacher with blushes that belied her manner.

'But that is not enough for me. I hate gratitude, unless I can work it off in action. Let me think what I can teach you—would you like to learn something about chemistry?'

'Not for worlds! I am wholly unscientific; I only care for art, and music, and unless you could give me lessons on the violin or in painting, I'm afraid there is nothing I want to learn!' and yet Johanna's pupil was all the while teaching her a lesson she little suspected.

'I can't teach you an art, that's certain, and yet—dear and respected teacher——'

'Sister!' gravely interrupted Johanna.

'No, I prefer to call you my teacher tonight.'

'And I prefer to call you brother Richard.'

'But if I do not reply with sister, it is an absurdity. No, call me your pupil, anything else you like! Do you know, I think we are too old to play at being brother and sister,' and the colour rose to Richard's face; 'I sha'n't play any more, as the children say!'

'Then if you speak like a child, I shall speak like another, and say, You unkind thing, why won't you play?'

'I would do anything to please you except that one thing, Johanna! I shall not call you sister again, and I beg you never to call me brother, for—for'—and his voice trembled and was scarcely audible—'I have not a brother's love for you!'

For a moment Johanna's beautiful frank eyes flashed as though she resented what he said as an unkindness. Then the true meaning of his words suddenly came to her, and a softer light shone beneath her lowered eyelids.

'I will do as you wish; perhaps we are

too old to play at brother and sister,' for Johanna was discovering that she had wounded herself playing with edged tools.

Richard could hardly restrain himself from kissing the white hand that rested beside him on the German grammar.

'We began the pretty game in all sincerity, but it has become a lie, Johanna,' and words were trembling on his lips that would have decided the course of their lives. But he dared not utter them. What was he yet but her uncle's pensioner? It would be a mean and cowardly return for all Mr. Gage's goodness, to take advantage of the freedom he allowed him to win Johanna's love, yet the way in which she seemed to understand why they should cease to call one another brother and sister would have given him courage to speak there and then, if it had been honourable to do so. There followed a silence Richard dared not break, while inclination and duty, both equally strong, wrestled within him; Johanna had recovered her self-composure

before her pupil. 'Let us have our usual star-gazing, now that our lesson is over,' she said, and they turned towards the window together. Richard stood so near her she could feel the heavy beating of his heart, and with a virginal impulse she withdrew from him as far as the width of the window would allow.

'Look up, Richard; I can read the stars to-night! Shall I tell you what they say?' and he raised his eyes to the narrow strip of star-sprinkled darkness above the tree tops.

'The stars do not help me to look into the future, but I can read the present in them clearly; they tell me something that perhaps you will not like to hear—shall I go on?' and she looked enquiringly at Richard.

'You wish to say something to me, Johanna, that you do not like to say in your own person, and so you call the unknowing stars to your aid. It is as though you had always written to me as "dear Richard," and suddenly sent me a note beginning "Miss Gage presents

her compliments to Mr. Dare,"' and he precisely divined her frame of mind.

'If you call the stars unknowing they are singularly unlike you who gaze at them, for you are very penetrating indeed. Yes, I do want to tell you something that I dislike to say as much as I think you will dislike to hear; it is this—we have had the last of our lessons to-night, Richard!'

'Oh, Johanna, what do you mean? Have you suddenly decided this? Has your pupil grieved you? has he failed towards his teacher in any respect whatever?' and he spoke with an earnestness that troubled while it did not displease her.

'No, you have been a perfect pupil, and I have enjoyed teaching you more than I can tell you. But I am not a free agent quite, and besides you have made such progress with your German you no longer need my help; you can do very well without me now,' and her manner was hurried and confused.

This was a thunderbolt to Richard, who

had certainly made progress in conjugating the verb 'lieben' under Johanna's instruction, and could not see why the lessons should come to an end because of his proficiency.

'Don't give me up; I cannot do without you, I live for my evenings with you, I look forward to them all the week!' said the young man vehemently; then fearing he had gone too far, and bitterly remembering his dependent position, 'You know I like German immensely, but if you won't teach me any more, I'll never open a German book again. I'll throw the whole confounded lot of them into the fire!'

Johanna smiled.

'Who would you punish most by that, yourself or me? But our lessons have come to an end like other pleasant things, and Uncle John will tell you what he has decided to do that will put a stop to them entirely. In about six weeks he and I are going to Florence, where I have often told you we lived before we knew you, and we shall stay there for a long

time. My uncle's health is not very good and he is tired of London; I am not, but where he goes, of course, I go too, so we shall both disappear from this scene together.'

If Johanna's first announcement had been like a thunderbolt to Richard, the second was comparable to an earthquake, for the ground seemed to reel beneath him. He should lose Johanna, lose her out of his daily life, lose her out of his sight. With her would go all the loveliness, gentleness, and refinement from his prosaic, hard, struggling life, and before he knew what he was doing he had clasped her hands in his, as though she were about to be torn from him there and then.

'Oh, my best Johanna, what will become of me without you—without you and your uncle! This house has been more than a home to me, your kindness more than life. You cannot know what a blow it is to me!' and she gently released herself and turned from the window to the room again.

'You cannot miss us more than we shall

miss you! But do not take too dark a view of it, Richard. We are not gone yet, and when we are, even if we make our home in Florence, we shall be certain to visit London. I thought you might feel it a good deal, so I have not spoken to you about it earlier; but let us go into the library, I know Uncle John wants to tell you about it himself,' and before Richard could reach the door to open it, Johanna had done so herself, and was halfway down the stairs.

When she had taken Richard into Mr. Gage's study, with its thick and pungent atmosphere of tobacco smoke, she did not stay there herself, but bidding them both good-night, left them together.

Mr. Gage was exceedingly cheerful that night, as a man is who has at length made up a somewhat wavering mind. After months of hesitation he had resolved to leave England shortly, and pleasant memories of foreign life confirmed him in the wisdom of his decision.

'So Johanna has told you what we are going to do,' he said, laying down a volume

of the Waverleys he was reading. 'I have spent several years in Italy, the happiest years of my life. I was a young man when first I went there, at the age when every place is a sort of Italy to one, but it retains its charm to the last as no other country does. I can't keep away any longer from the enchanted ground, and that's the truth of the matter.'

'I can see it will be pure gain to you, and Johanna, sir, but it will be all loss to me; I have no other friends worth mentioning but you.'

'Then you ought to have,' said the old gentleman cheerfully. 'It will be a good thing if it compels you to make some new friends, Richard. One should always have two strings to one's bow, or a hundred if you can.'

'But shall you be going away as soon as Johanna says, in about six weeks? It is such short notice,' urged Richard.

'I have treated my landlord better than my friends, and given him longer notice than

that. Yes, I intend to be off as soon as I can, and when next I am in England you will be a well-known operating surgeon, I hope. I shall leave you some of my books to console you in your loneliness, Richard, as hostages to be reclaimed by me on a future day,' and Mr. Gage nodded good humouredly.

Even that did not seem to relieve Richard's depression. Books instead of friends, indeed! He asked for bread, and was offered a stone.

'Thank you, you were always good to me,' he said, taking up the book nearest to him, without noticing its title.

'Pooh! Nonsense! You haven't had much time for reading yet, Richard; your medical studies have claimed every hour, so you must let me select for you the best specimens in English, French, and German literature that you ought to be acquainted with. Till you get outside the groove of your professional studies, you can't tell whether you know how to read or not, or for what purpose certain books are to be read. For example, many a

young fellow takes his Bible for a science primer, and because he doesn't find in it what it is not intended to teach, doubts or disbelieves the truths it alone does teach. But don't rush to the other extreme, and join the credulous throng that takes an attenuated homespun theology from a novel; in short, Richard, don't confound things that differ.'

'All my professional study should tend to help me to clear thought if I profit by it,' said Richard, hoping that it might be the right reply to Mr. Gage's remark. For his heart and mind were elsewhere, and he paid as much heed to his kindly mentor as other young men in the same circumstances, and never did old gentleman with theory to explain hold forth to a more dejected listener.

'The primary object of a novel should be to interest and divert,' continued the old gentleman, not noticing Richard's interruption, 'and if you will, obliquely to instruct, but instruction must not be its end and aim, and in so far as it is, it fails as a novel. Stick to

Scott and Dumas, my boy,' and Mr. Gage struck the volume of Scott he was reading with an appreciative and resounding slap. 'There you'll find interest, diversion, and instruction, artistically blended in due proportion and relation to each other. These great masters conjure up before you vivid scenes and wide fields of human thought and action; you are the spectator, and draw your own moral as you do from the events of real life. How poor beside all this is the modern novel offered to us, treating of the introspective egoism of some weak, self-conscious soul, whose belief, unbelief or peculiarity of belief, is thought worth recording through three volumes to the bitter end. The title of such a book should be "View of an Interior," it is in reality a treatise on spiritual anæmia; and what masculine soul can be refreshed by such fare?'

While Mr. Gage was exceedingly happy in delivering his mind, Richard played no other part than that of an excellent and preoccupied listener, but no sooner was he gone

than his old friend mentally paid him a flattering tribute. 'Fine fellow, young Dare! Talks just a little too much, perhaps, but all that he says is well worth hearing, and I excuse him on that account.'

For the last few evenings before Mr. Gage and his niece took their departure, Johanna avoided being alone with Richard, and when he followed her into the drawing-room, she seated herself at the piano, and conversed with him in music. He could not resent her new-found reserve. It was one of the inscrutable ways of a woman, to those who are new to them, full of tantalising charm. *Souvent femme varie*, and who could tell but that the next change of mood might not make amends for all!

'You must let me down gently, Johanna,' he said under cover of the 'Song Without Words' she was playing, that rippled on like the sound of small waves on a sandy beach, 'you must let me down gently. After four years of your friendship, I cannot lose you

altogether. I shall write to you, and you must answer me sometimes, indeed you must!'

But the suave flowing melody went on without a break, and Richard drew his chair nearer to the piano; Johanna answered him without turning towards him: 'I will write to you if you will not say another word about my going away, and if you will promise when we part to say good-bye as if we were to meet again to-morrow.'

'Hard conditions, Johanna! but you leave me no alternative! Yes, I promise,' and the 'Song Without Words' came to an end, and as though to mark a complete change of subject, Johanna played an exquisite waltz, so expressive of the poetry of motion, it was enough to make the feet of the lame to dance.

As Mr. Gage intended to make a long stay abroad, he sent his furniture to be stored, and gave up the house in Queen Square, which was soon stripped of all that rendered it homelike and attractive. In a few days, Richard's dear friends would be gone, and the spot where

he had spent the happiest hours in his life be desolate and unrecognisable. Their voices echoed in the empty rooms, the crude light shone through curtainless windows on the nakedness within, and their footsteps resounded on the bare boards of floor and staircase. Vans laden with furniture drove away from the house, leaving desolation behind them. The steps and pavement were littered with paper and straw, as the last and most important packing-case was removed containing Johanna's piano, and when Richard saw it carried out of the house, it seemed to him the coffin wherein melody lay dead.

The following morning Richard bade goodbye to Mr. Gage and Johanna, at Charing Cross station. His old friend became most affectionately kind as the moment of parting drew near.

'You have fulfilled all my expectations and hopes of you so far, Richard. In a couple of years or so, I expect you will be making your way in your profession,' he said.

'I hope so, too, and the moment that I can do without your kind help, I shall thank you for it with all my heart, and beg you to withdraw it,' replied Richard, grasping Mr. Gage's hand.

'Don't be in too much of a hurry about that. I shall not take away your support—your crutches as it were—till you are firm on your own feet, and can go alone. My banker will send you the usual sum every month, and be sure and write, and report progress, for we shall miss our Sunday evening chats together. And, my dear fellow, don't forget what I said to you on the subject of books; you'll find it true when you come to think it over.'

And now farewells were said, and Mr. Gage and his niece had taken their places in the carriage, and could it be, or was Richard deceiving himself when he saw that there were tears in Johanna's eyes? Was this how she said good-bye as though they were to meet again to-morrow? Richard clasped her

hand for the second time, and the train, the fiery dragon of the nineteenth century, bore his friends away from him, and the last glimpse he had was of Mr. Gage waving good-bye from the window. Richard was destined never to see his old friend again, and as though he had a foreboding of it, the momentary sight of the familiar face was indelibly stamped in his memory. He stood with his heart swelling within him, unmindful of all around him, watching the lessening train as it rushed from the station, till a loud 'By your leave, please,' roused him to the fact that he was obstructing the platform traffic, and avoiding the truck that was bearing down upon him, he hurried away into the street.

The light and joy had gone out of Richard's life for the present, and in spite of the three million inhabitants of London, he felt lonely as though he were on a desert island. There was nothing now to divert him from his work, no happy relaxation to

look forward to after long days of toil. He must endeavour to drown regret in work, and yet more work, as another man might seek to stupify himself with drink. Richard was in danger of becoming a very old young man.

CHAPTER XII

CONTEMPORARY HISTORY

In the world's opinion marriage, as in a play, winds up everything; whereas it is, in fact, the beginning of everything.

MME. SCHWETCHINE.

GREAT events often turn on small hinges, and Margaret Featherstone could not have imagined that the apparently insignificant fact of her pony casting a shoe, and the ensuing visit to the blacksmith's, had altered the course of a human life. She was necessarily as unconscious of having shaped Richard Atherley's career, as the stone thrown into a narrow stream and diverting its current is unconscious of determining the direction in which the future river shall flow, and naturally she never gave another thought to the blacksmith's son, after she and her father rode away from the forge.

Margaret grew up amply fulfilling the promise of beauty in which her childhood was so rich, and Mr. Featherstone, the anxious parent of a lovely, headstrong daughter, had never so sincerely regretted the loss of his wife, as when he realised his inability to guide or counsel her child. Some day he hoped the responsibility would be lifted from his shoulders, though he had no wish that Margaret should make a very early marriage. But circumstances took their course without deferring to Mr. Featherstone. Margaret was married, or rather insisted upon being married, in green immaturity to a husband thirty years older than herself, and voluntarily slipped her young head under a yoke no one else would have been so cruel as to press upon her.

At seventeen a girl neither knows herself nor the world she lives in. She is a callow bird that should be under the mother's wing, and is as little capable of choosing a husband to live with all her days, as the fledgling is

of building a nest to withstand the gales of winter. But Margaret had no mother to shelter her inexperience under a maternal wing. She was an imaginative and impressionable young creature, and when the handsome, grey-haired Colonel Peveril came to visit her father, she sat spell-bound at his feet, and idealised him as her Othello.

Never before had Margaret listened to stories of noble and thrilling adventure of which the narrator was the hero, and the romantic girl followed the Colonel's stirring history of his Indian and African campaigns with devouring interest. Of all things a young girl adores physical courage in a man. As she grows older another form of courage, and other qualities, may appeal to her as strongly. But in her youth she feels as women felt when the world was young, that the man of brave deeds is the hero: the poet, the thinker, the scholar appear later on the scene. It is a primitive instinct of sex that makes a woman regard with a feeling akin to adora-

tion the man who does not fear to shed blood in a righteous cause, who defends the honour of his country at the peril of his life. He towers head and shoulders above the man of words, whose glib, time-serving tongue may send brave men to their death, while he performs no higher acts of physical courage than alighting from an omnibus in motion, or crossing Piccadilly Circus on foot.

No wonder that Colonel Peveril, war weary, and scarred with honourable wounds, assumed heroic proportions in Margaret Featherstone's eyes. She could not look at his scarred wrist and brow without a thrill of hero worship, and had it ended there, her acquaintance with the Colonel would have remained an unmixed benefit to the enthusiastic girl. It would have done her good to have had her powers of admiration worthily excited. But unhappily the beautiful child's undisguised worship stirred a chord in Colonel Peveril's breast that had not vibrated for many a long year. He

fell in love with Margaret, so far as a man of cold, self-contained nature, and indifferent to women, can be said to fall in love, and he proposed to her father for her.

Mr. Featherstone's first instinct was to say no to the Colonel; but he had so indulged his daughter that she as little knew how to take a denial as he to utter it. She was delighted and flattered that her hero did her the unspeakable honour of wishing to make her his wife, and her father reluctantly consented, trying hard to believe that Margaret knew best what she wanted.

It would have been well, since Mr. Featherstone had gone against his sound British sense, if he could have consulted a French parent on the subject of a young girl choosing her husband. But he soothed away his misgivings by reflecting that if it went wrong, at any rate his daughter could not reproach him. 'I never have thwarted my motherless child, and I cannot begin to do it the first time she has set her heart on anything,' and in a couple

of months Margaret was married to her venerable hero, wearing her first long dress on her wedding-day.

Es ist ein altes Liedchen—one has heard it so often the wonder is there should be found a couple with the temerity to repeat the experiment of a marriage between those who are separated by nature's inexorable barrier of time. Thirty years between the age of the hero and the worshipper, or between father and child, is beautiful and befitting the relationship; but in marriage, which was first instituted between contemporaries, it is a gulf that cannot be bridged over.

Colonel Peveril had the convictions, opinions, and manners proper to his age and experience. His wife, belonging to a later generation, sharply divided from the preceding one, looked at life with other eyes than his, and could see nothing from his standpoint. By no effort of imagination could the elderly husband put himself in the place of the young wife, or she in his, nor had he the indulgent,

affectionate temperament that would have compensated for much, if he had treated Margaret as an old man's darling.

Married in haste, Mrs. Peveril was now at leisure to observe her hero sink gradually to a level where she was spared the mental tension of looking up to him any longer as a superior being. She discovered how much less interesting was the man than the circumstances that had invested him with a charm, and she endeavoured with all the loyalty of her young heart to surround him once more with the halo of enchantment through which she had first seen him. But the same illusion cannot be made to do duty twice in a life-time. Unhappily the marriage was childless, a state of things that has been compared to the heavens without the sun; but whether this be true or not, it is certain that young Mrs. Peveril felt her life sadly in want of illumination.

The first few years of their married life Colonel and Mrs. Peveril spent on the Con-

tinent, where rapid change of scene and the excitement of travel prevented the young wife from realising the full extent of her disappointment. But when they settled in one spot for several months, she had time to grow weary of her lonely days, and to become acutely and dangerously bored. But while it was impossible for Margaret to love her husband, it was equally impossible for her to feel anything approaching contempt for him. Colonel Peveril was an upright, honourable gentleman, guilty of but one mistake in his life, when in a fit of enthusiasm, that surprised no one more than himself after it subsided, he had asked a young girl to become his wife. Mr. Featherstone did not live long enough after his daughter's marriage to see how sound his instinct against it had been.

The Colonel was engaged in writing a military history of the campaigns of Central Europe, and when he had visited and inspected a hundred battle-fields and satisfied himself as to every geographical detail, he

returned to England to devote himself without distraction to his work. As he could only write when he was alone, he kept himself the greater part of the day like a treasure, under lock and key, and he and his wife only met at breakfast and dinner, for he lunched by himself in his study. While his days were spent at his desk it did not occur to him to ask his young wife how she passed her time, or who were her friends. He considered that in making her his wife, he had conferred an honour upon her that exempted him from taking any further trouble to secure her happiness. She was left to herself in her inexperience, virtually without guidance or control, a young, beautiful woman, disillusioned in her marriage, longing for the sympathy she did not meet with at home, and with the sole exception of her pre-occupied husband, exercising a charm over every man in her acquaintance.

Mrs. Peveril had to make her own interests, and seek her own pleasures, and she availed

herself largely of her liberty. Her life was so empty within, she grasped at every outward distraction with avidity. She went everywhere and knew every one, and ran through as pretty a series of flirtations as ever wife did, who managed to maintain any sort of reputation. She hankered after celebrities great and small, from the Poet Laureate to the latest gymnast at the Aquarium, including all that lay between, and she hunted them like the hart upon the mountains. But what she loved best were aspirants for fame, whose success was not yet assured, and who were still in the humble frame of mind that made them grateful for her recognition and appreciation.

Mrs. Peveril's nimble intelligence and love of change kept pace with society hobbies, which she rode for a time furiously, till she grew tired and went after something new. At present, having exhausted the theatrical hobby, she was ardently absorbed in ambulance classes and hospital visiting, and though

she cared for neither entertainment, she took them up with a fervour that deceived herself, and gave her friends leisure to speculate what her next pursuit was likely to be.

CHAPTER XIII

A MOMENTOUS WALK

There is no such thing as chance; and what seems to us merest accident springs from the deepest source of destiny.
SCHILLER.

AFTER the departure of Mr. Gage and Johanna, Richard flung himself into his work with renewed energy, striving to overcome the sense of solitude and loss that weighed upon him. Among many unhappy feelings, he was spared that of self-reproach. He was satisfied that he had acted rightly towards Mr. Gage, in not trying to win Johanna's love. It would have been a great presumption, and taking unworthy advantage of his immense kindness. No; he was master of himself, and must live this new feeling down into the original friendship from which it sprang. Richard was not a spoilt child to

snatch at what he wanted and clamour if it was denied him, and he set his practical mind to believe that it was best both for him and Johanna that this thing could not be. And he allowed no more freedom to his pen than to his tongue, and wrote to her merely as an intimate friend would, but at great length and very often.

At first their letters resembled their conversation, glancing lightly from one topic to another, and nothing that happened to them, or that they thought about, was too trivial to be related in detail. But this purely personal kind of correspondence can only be kept up at a white heat between those who are newly separated, and still retain a complete knowledge of each other's surroundings and mode of life. And this essential for continued close correspondence was lacking, for Johanna had returned to a world of which Richard, whose nose had never projected over the white cliffs of Albion, knew nothing, and it is difficult to make the

unknown interesting or intelligible. And Richard's surroundings, with which she had been familiar, changed quickly and entirely as he became better known, and made more friends and acquaintances than he could possibly describe or introduce to her in letters. So it came to pass in the course of nature, that their correspondence languished for mere want of matter to keep it going.

At the end of a year, separation had done its inevitable work in lessening the urgent desire to meet again, and in inducing calmness of mind where a storm had threatened. Richard still faithfully told Johanna any circumstance he thought likely to interest her about himself, and of his advance in his profession which he loved better than life. She in return informed him that she was studying art almost as enthusiastically as he studied surgery, though with what result remained to be seen. For the rest she wrote about her Uncle John, whose health often caused her anxiety, and airily discussed

things in general, without mentioning that she had lovers as well as friends and acquaintances about her. Johanna believed that she was heart whole, and yet when it came to the point she found that she liked no one so well as her late pupil, whom she would have preferred for her future master to any other man alive. In the meanwhile, though she refused to marry, her life was full and happy, and she looked for time to bring her and Richard together, or to extinguish the smouldering fire that he had stifled by the quicker process of an effort of will.

On a raw November day two years after Johanna and her uncle went abroad, Richard was walking from Hyde Park Corner to the Marble Arch. He seldom came so far westward, and there was nothing in the aspect of the Park on such an afternoon to make him wish to come there oftener. The air was thick and murky, the sky overhead leaden, the ground underfoot wet and slippery, inlaid with a brown and yellow mosaic of dead

leaves trodden into the moist soil, and the varnished panels of the carriages that rolled by were bespattered with mud like carts on a country road. Every one he met looked preoccupied and uncomfortable, except the children out for their afternoon walk, who had broken loose from their governesses and were playing at horses, or bowling their hoops with light-hearted mirth, such as even a spring morning cannot waken in the heart of their elders.

As Richard strode along he was as usual pondering an interesting surgical case under his care, and could not easily have been disturbed in his meditation had he not suddenly caught sight of a face that drove every thought but that of its radiancy from his mind. It was Margaret Featherstone ; he had seen her at long intervals all the years he had lived in London, and lovely as he remembered her to have been, her beauty now fairly surprised him. She had just left her carriage, and was walking westward into the Park, apparently

for the benefit of a very fat and breathless pug who objected to exercise, and was being dragged along rather than led by her maid.

Richard did not hesitate to follow at a distance, in the hope that he might catch another glimpse of the face of faces to him. What memories it called up! how its beauty when he first saw it had illumined a sordid scene, and made it the turning-point in his life! If only he could meet her and be introduced to her, the gulf between them was no longer impassable. It had narrowed till friendship might clasp hands across it, or love throw a bridge over it. By-and-by Richard's thoughts returned to sublunary matters, and he watched with amusement the spoilt antics of the pug. The little beast had once been slender, agile and dog-like, but he had so long fared sumptuously every day, and taken so little exercise, that his figure was hopelessly lost in rolls of fat, and had he gone on two legs instead of four, he would have been recommended to undergo a cure at

Marienbad. As the day was cold and Toby had ostentatiously shivered on the hearthrug before he came out, he wore his grey velvet winter coat, securely fastened about his rotund frame. His apoplectic neck was encircled by a Russia leather collar studded with silver bosses, and ornamented with tiny silver bells that tinkled at every movement. His eyes stood out like prawns' eyes, and he was open-mouthed and panting, giving one the opportunity to notice that his tongue was as long as his breath was short. In spite of all his pomp and luxury, poor Toby's expression was absurdly agitated and distressed, and Richard diagnosed his case correctly, and predicted death from fatty degeneration of the heart.

If the pug was a ridiculous object to human eyes, imagine what he must appear in those of his fellow dogs. Not one of them passed him unnoticed or with indifference. They made spiteful and contemptuous remarks aloud, and if he had not been led by a string, they would have chased poor Toby across the

Park. Hungry dogs hated him for his bloated and overfed appearance, cold dogs were jealous of his top coat, and warm dogs scorned him for his effeminacy in wearing one at all. Dogs who fought longed to challenge him to single combat, because they knew he could not fight, and dogs who killed rats or cultivated any other useful industry, looked upon him with contempt as a lazy, useless thing. The tinkling of his silver bells irritated all sober-minded dogs, and Toby was as much hated by his kind, as though he instead of his mistress had devised and put on his preposterous adornments.

Richard walked unobserved some yards behind Margaret Featherstone, and it seemed, to his quick apprehension, that her little dog might be the means of an introduction between its mistress and himself. A fierce black and white colley had made a spring at poor Toby as he passed, and if his owner had not been at hand with a whip and called him to heel, Richard would have had to interfere

on the wretched little creature's behalf. But his opportunity came quickly from another quarter. A rough-haired English terrier, free from the controlling presence of a master, observed Toby from afar, and came bounding over the grass with his neck bristles erect, for a closer inspection of this object of offence to dogs and men. For an instant he stood trembling with disgust, and then in the silence that means mischief, sprang on the unhappy pug, and would have made short work with him, if Richard had not come to the rescue. Margaret tried to seize the terrier by the collar to drag him off Toby, but Richard said: 'Leave him to me! Don't attempt to touch him, or he will turn on you!' and he struck the dog with his cane with all his force several times before he would loose his hold. He quite understood the terrier's feelings, but if one stops to weigh every one's motives in a crisis, nothing is done, so he laid his stick about him again.

The maid accompanied the course of

events with a series of thin screams, and in her agitation wound Toby's chain about his legs, so that he was delivered bound hand and foot into the power of the enemy. But when Richard had driven the terrier away howling, it was found that Toby's top coat and collar, with bells, bosses, and chain wrapped about him like armour, had saved him from any serious hurt. His overcoat was rent in pieces, his collar marked with the teeth of the foe, and his bells bitten flat so that they would never tinkle again, but beyond a torn ear and a few bruises, he was not materially more infirm than when the bristling terrier pounced upon him.

'How can I thank you enough for coming to our help?' said Margaret still trembling with agitation. 'But for your kindness, my little dog would have been killed!'

'I am only too glad to have been of the slightest service. It is very lucky the pug wore his winter clothes; it has saved his life. He is more frightened than hurt,' and Richard

examined Toby again to see that he had made no mistake.

'He is very heavy for his size, and he has lost his breath with fright; you must let me carry him for you to your carriage; he cannot possibly walk,' he said, lifting the whimpering pug in his arms, and its tail, that a few minutes ago had been crisply curled over its back, hung limp and straight with dejection.

'I cannot think why it is that dogs are so spiteful to my poor Toby,' said his mistress walking by Richard's side, while he carried the victim; 'he runs the gauntlet of all the dogs in the neighbourhood when he is taken out for a walk. I suppose they are jealous of him, for he seems to rouse some very human passions in them.'

'I am afraid his velvet coat is too much for their peace of mind. If Toby is to hold his own he should be able to fight for his property, and he is not made on that plan,' said Richard smiling.

The maid meanwhile had hastened on

before them, and catching sight of the carriage beckoned wildly to the footman, who interpreting it as a signal of distress, laid dignity aside, and ran to see what was the matter. Great was Richard's grief to find that his walk by Margaret's side was shortened by several minutes, when John Thomas presented himself, and relieved him of the demoralised pug. He could not with propriety remain any longer, now that Miss Featherstone had a servant and maid to look after her and Toby, and they parted, she with many thanks and expressions of gratitude, and he with unspoken regrets. She did not ask his name, and she little thought that the useful stranger had often seen her before, and idealised her for many a year. Richard watched her carriage leave the Park at Cumberland Gate, and forgetting what had brought him westward, retraced his steps, inly blessing timid pugs and bellicose terriers by whose means he had been able to speak with Margaret Featherstone, and render her a service.

At dinner that evening Mrs. Peveril gave her husband the history of her adventure in the Park.

'A good thing some one came to the rescue, or that apoplectic little brute would have been killed,' said the Colonel drily.

Margaret knew her husband's sentiments with regard to Toby, so she merely said:

'Yes, it was very fortunate. I wish now I had asked to whom I was indebted for such kindness. He is a gentleman decidedly. Shall I advertise in the "Times," saying I should like to thank him personally?'

'If he is a gentleman he will not wish to utilise an act of common civility to obtain an introduction. You had better be content with Toby's safety, without wanting to enlarge your acquaintance with the addition of Dick, Tom, or Harry,' and the Colonel emptied his glass of generous burgundy with an expression that would have led any one who was not in the secret to suppose his beverage was vinegar.

CHAPTER XIV

MRS. PEVERIL

It is only at the first encounter that a face makes its full impression on us.—SCHOPENHAUER.

MRS. PEVERIL had been too much terrified, at the time of Toby's imminent peril, to pay any particular attention to his deliverer, yet on looking back she felt that he had impressed her favourably. His face, if not decidedly good-looking, was clever and interesting, and of all things she admired men who were not commonplace. Yes, she made a mistake when she forgot to ask him his name.

But she was not destined to remain long in ignorance as to who and what was Toby's champion, for shortly afterwards Mrs. Peveril again met Richard Dare in the last place where either would have expected to see the other,

in a ward of the Eastminster Hospital. Mrs. Peveril was at the time very much taken up with the theory of nursing and the practice of hospital visiting. The charm of novelty still hung about her new pastime, and though it was the third hospital she had inspected that day, she was as unwearied as Royalty itself. She entered the ward accompanied by Dr. Muir, one of the visiting physicians, while Richard was going his afternoon round among his patients, and her unexpected presence startled and thrilled him with delight.

The sight of the fair face that had come as a sudden illumination into his life, recalled with overwhelming force that first memorable meeting. Time and space seemed annihilated, and he saw once more the beautiful young girl with glowing hair and eyes, and himself the rough boy blowing the bellows in the forge; he could hear the ring of the hammer on the anvil, and the cheery voice of Mr. Featherstone. His heart beat violently, his face flushed, and his thoughts wandered so

wide of his duty it was well for his patient's peace of mind he did not know how little attention Mr. Dare was giving to the bandaging of his broken wrist, which to the owner of it, of course, was the centre of a disorganised universe. Margaret was talking with Dr. Muir, and did not notice Richard as she passed him, wafting delicate perfume from the soft folds of her graceful dress. The patient turned his head to follow the lady with admiring eyes, while the surgeon frowned and drew the bandage tighter.

As soon as his task was finished, Dr. Muir approached him, with Margaret smiling radiantly. The doctor was a stout grey-haired man, wearing a tightly buttoned frock coat, and with a suave bedside manner that did not forsake him even in speaking to a healthy human being of his own sex.

'Now that you are at liberty, Dare, let me introduce you to Mrs. Peveril, a lady who is deeply interested in philanthropic works, especially in hospitals and sick nursing, and

indeed in everything that tends to ameliorate the sufferings of the afflicted poor,' and Dr. Muir had not rounded off his sentence before Margaret held out her hand with charming frankness.

'Mr. Dare! I have had the pleasure of meeting you before, when you so kindly came to the rescue of my poor little dog in the Park! I am delighted to have the opportunity of thanking you again, for I was too agitated to do so at the time as I ought to have done. Toby must thank you too; he soon recovered from his fright.'

'I was evidently his predestined deliverer. I so seldom go as far west as the Park,' said Richard, blushing painfully and ill at ease.

'Dr. Muir, Mr. Dare is not a stranger to me; he saved my little dog's life, and you may imagine how grateful I am to him,' and Mrs. Peveril turned towards the doctor with her brilliant smile, which she flashed like a light alternately in his face and Richard's.

'So you have met our house surgeon

before! We are afraid we shall not have him here much longer, his skill and reputation cannot be confined to the Eastminster Hospital only.'

'I can assure you that your fame has spread beyond these walls already,' said Mrs. Peveril with the charming flattery of a good-natured woman of the world, and this time turning her smile full upon Richard. 'Only the other day I heard a wonderfully successful operation of yours praised by those who were competent to judge of its skill,' and Richard, a novice to the dulcet piping of ladies of fashion, drank in the delicious words with avidity.

But though he was strongly agitated by his meeting with Margaret, and by the shock of learning that she was no longer Miss Featherstone but Mrs. Peveril, it did not deprive him of the power of observation, or prevent him receiving a vivid and truthful impression. He saw, with quick intuition, that her lovely face in attaining the full

development of womanly beauty, had lost even more than it had gained. Every trace of the spiritual type of her maiden loveliness had vanished as though it had never been, and was succeeded by a purely mundane beauty, appealing to the senses rather than to the imagination. The loss of girlish innocence, increased knowledge of the world, and the disillusion of her marriage, had set their mark on her sensitive face, which was that of a woman who has tasted the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and of evil. At sixteen Margaret, in purity of feature, expression, and tints, resembled a young St. Catherine, to be looked at with religious emotion. At eight-and-twenty she was like a radiant Venetian lady, such as Paris Bordogne loved to paint, ample, splendid, glowing with life and colour, with magnificent red brown eyes, not easily abashed, and with nothing to suggest the celestial to the wildest imagination.

All this rushed through Richard's mind with lightning rapidity, but present vivid

impression is so much stronger than memory, that his recollection of the tender purity of Margaret's girlish face was obliterated by the mundane, aggressive beauty of her maturity.

Mrs. Peveril gave a comprehensive glance at Mr. Dare with her handsome, experienced eyes. In spite of his somewhat abrupt and agitated manner, or perhaps on account of it, for it was clearly caused by her speaking to him, she felt interested in the house surgeon, on her own account as well as on Toby's. Dr. Muir had told her of some remarkable articles of Mr. Dare's in medical and scientific papers, of his extraordinary skill as an operator, and of his power of diagnosis in obscure cases, amounting almost to intuition, and that great things were expected of him.

All this was pleasant hearing to Mrs. Peveril, who though nominally a Christian was in reality a worshipper of the Sun, that is to say, of the rising Sun, for when she met with a struggling man of talent, as yet unknown, if he interested her, she seized upon

him as her natural prey, and treated him with a quaint mixture of flattery and patronage. But when the Sun had mounted high above the horizon in art or literature, where all might judge of his capacity, and her prescience became valueless, she dropped her *protégé* at once. She would be all or nothing to him. Repeatedly as Mrs. Peveril's name had been linked with that of some aspirant for fame just emerging from obscurity, she had never helped to swell the throng of female devotees that cluster round a man of established reputation. Her pride forbade it, though her vanity made her willing to take him by the hand in his unknown days, when he had neither disciples nor followers.

'I do not know what Dr. Muir may have shown you in the hospital,' said Richard, who was now at ease in Mrs. Peveril's presence, 'but as he belongs to the medical and I to the surgical side, I should be delighted if there is anything in my special department you would like to see.'

'Thanks very much. Would you take me through a surgical ward, and show me the theatre where you do all your beautiful dreadful operations,' and she gave a pretty little shudder that would have sunk Johanna fathoms in his estimation, but that struck him as sensitive and womanly in Mrs. Peveril.

'This is a surgical ward we are in now,' he replied; 'almost every one here has broken bones, or cuts and contusions, as you see by arms in slings, and bandaged and plastered heads. Where you notice a patient in bed with a cradle under the blankets to take the weight off him, that means a case of broken leg or ankle.'

'But how is it that your bandaged and plastered patients look so much more cheerful than the poor creatures I have just visited in the medical wards?' asked Mrs. Peveril with surprise. 'I never saw so many sad faces, or heard so many sad voices, and yet they had nothing to show for it, as these

have who look as though they had been in the wars.'

'I think I can explain that,' said Richard eagerly. 'In a medical ward you meet with every kind of depressing ailment, that tries the temper and affects the spirits, that admit of no swift and definite remedies, as most surgical cases do. For unlike surgical science medical science to this day is largely experimental. Doctors are compelled constantly to try the nature and power of various medicines on their patients, as the only means of finding out what will really help them, and under these circumstances it would be too much to expect them to look cheerful,' and he smiled at Dr. Muir as he spoke. 'Now the bulk of cases in this ward are accidents that happen to a man in his ordinary health. He comes here, has chloroform given him, is operated upon at once, and lies in bed comfortably for a few days or weeks afterwards, eating good food, and often quite well and in the best of spirits.'

'You must not believe all that Mr. Dare says about us physicians,' said Dr. Muir turning to Mrs. Peveril. 'While he speaks disrespectfully of our medicines, he does not tell you how many patients die under the surgeon's infallible knife.'

'That's easily ascertained; there is a record kept of our failures, but no one can compute the deaths attributable to drugs of all kinds, and worse than that, the maimed lives.'

'That is ground for a very pretty quarrel between medicine and surgery,' said Mrs. Peveril smiling, 'and a hospital the battlefield where it should be fought out,' and while she was speaking a messenger came in search of Mr. Dare, who was wanted at once in the receiving room, where a bad accident case had just been brought in. 'Coming directly,' he said in mechanical tones. Then turning to Mrs. Peveril, 'I am sorry I cannot have the pleasure of showing you the operating theatre to-day, for I must go about my business,' he said with very genuine regret. 'But if at

any other time when Dr. Muir is unable to accompany you, and you should care to come again, I shall be delighted to be your guide,' and promising to pay them another visit shortly, Mrs. Peveril bade him good-bye.

Richard had just learned a fact which he might easily have anticipated, but for which by some unaccountable lack of imagination he was unprepared. He had always thought of Margaret as Margaret Featherstone; it had never occurred to him that in all probability she had changed her name by now. He had often thought of Johanna as a wife, and wondered that she was not married, but Margaret was always Margaret Featherstone to him, set apart in his mind from other women and their common destiny. She was married now, and more hopelessly beyond his reach even than she had been in her girlhood, when he was still behind the chemist's counter. He hated the thought of her as Mrs. Peveril; it was destructive of every hope and illusion he had

cherished in the depths of his heart, and the next time he met Dr. Muir, who was evidently an acquaintance of hers, he asked him who and what sort of a man her husband was. Unconsciously to himself Richard did not question him as though it were a mere matter of curiosity, and from the warmth he displayed the doctor drew his own conclusions.

'You seem uncommonly interested in Mrs. Peveril and her domestic affairs,' he said, 'but you have met her before, and naturally want to know more about such a striking person. I don't know her husband, but he is a man of good family, old enough to be her father, and how she came to marry the Colonel when she was too young to have had a husband of any description, I can't tell. He leads a very recluse life, turned literary man in his old age, I believe, and lets Mrs. Peveril do pretty much as she likes; doesn't even pay her the compliment to be jealous of her, and that's a slight no attractive woman can forgive. She

has no children to occupy her, and is pretty much at a loose end, I should fancy. She's desperately handsome, and she knows it; she's a dangerous woman, mind you, and we may congratulate ourselves, I that I am an elderly man and not made of inflammable stuff, and you that though you are young you don't move in her circle. She has great powers of fascination and doesn't scruple to use them.'

'Why did you tell me when you introduced me to her, that she was a lady given to philanthropy, and so on?' asked Richard.

'It's only what she would tell you herself, and believe it, too,' said Dr. Muir laughing. 'But you have met her before, I think you said?'

'Yes, I have seen her several times; hers is not a face to be easily forgotten.'

Dr. Muir looked up sharply with his small grey eyes.

'You have seen her several times, and you mean to see her again, Dare! Well, don't say that I haven't warned you. You don't

know much of women, I think, shut up all your time in a hospital where the "Ewigweibliche" is represented only by invalids and their nurses, and I admit that when a goddess of beauty and health appears on the scene, it is enough to turn a young doctor's head. You're playing with fire, Dare, if you want to know more of a beautiful, capricious young wife, unhappy in her marriage, and looking out for amusement at any cost, with a keen eye, too, for a clever, promising young fellow in any rank of life. If you are to be a successful medical man, you know that a wife must be a part of your equipment—you will have to marry and forget that syrens exist.'

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